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One Good Thing

A play in Two Acts

By Don Zolidis

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Cast of Characters

The Families:
ERYNNE O'NEILL, 17, a troubled punk girl.
ERYNNE'S FATHER, (Brad), 40ish, a former pitcher, partly disabled and unemployed.
ERYNNE's MOTHER, (Gail), 40ish, soft-spoken and defeated.
DIERDRE O'NEILL, 14, Erynne's older sister, dead for five years.

TRAVIS ARNESON, 17, sweet, awkward, a little bit bored.
NICK ARNESON, 20, Travis' older brother, a marine.
TRAVIS' FATHER, (Jim), 45, married 23 years, going through a mid-life crisis.
TRAVIS' MOTHER, (Terri), 42, married 23 years, not going through a mid-life crisis.

Erynne's world:
NEMO, 18, her boyfriend. Charming, ruthless, a little dangerous.
TRANK, 18, a criminal from a Christian Academy.
CHUBB, 16, a thin punk girl.
SCOOTER, 17, a very strange boy.
ROHAN, 21, Scooter's older brother, a warlock.
ESMERELDA, 23, Scooter's older sister, normal in comparison.

Travis' world:
KIMBERLY WALUSCHKA, 17, his next-door neighbor, beautiful.
JESSIE WALUSCHKA, 13, Kimberly's younger sister, a little weird.
LILY, 13, Jessie's depressed friend.
MORGAN, 13, Jessie's friend.
KALLIE, 14, Jessie's aggressive friend.
DANICA, 13, Jessie's friend.
KATIE, 17, Kimberly's friend. A prep.

Other Characters:
MISS WINDHORST, 40ish, a flustered history teacher.
ANNOUNCING VOICE
MINISTER
NURSE
PERSONS 1-4, people at a party.
MARINES
Other students

A note on the language: Some productions may wish to substitute the words in <brackets> for the words in the script to make the play more suitable for school audiences. Other language deemed unsuitable may be changed as necessary.

"One Good Thing" is intended for ages 13 and up, and may not be appropriate for younger audience members.

Cast

One Good Thing was originally produced at Haltom High School from October 21st-24th, 2005. The original cast was as follows:

ERYNNE O'NEILL	Sarah Harbison
ERYNNE'S FATHER	Chase Robinson
ERYNNE's MOTHER	Sarah Dickerson
DIERDRE O'NEILL	Jenna McDade
TRAVIS ARNESON	Trevin McLaughlin
NICK ARNESON	Sterling Mathis
TRAVIS' FATHER	Jef Erwin
TRAVIS' MOTHER	Maeghan Gibson
NEMO	Anthony Hernandez
TRANK	Jeffrey Branch
CHUBB	Alyssa Jones
SCOOTER	Jordan Starks
ROHAN	Kevin Whiteside
ESMERELDA	Roxanne Moore
KIMBERLY WALUSCHKA	Sonia Rehman
JESSIE WALUSCHKA	Jewel Gobea
LILY	Yanina Gonzalez
MORGAN	Alysia Martinez
KALLIE	Bre Gibson
DANICA	Natalie Bodak
KATIE	Chloe Gobea
MISS WINDHORST	Christina Thompson
MINISTER	Jake Hill
NURSE	Alysia Martinez
PARTY PEOPLE	Samone Scott
	David Sylvester
	Chelsea Spaulding
	Lauren Rowland
	Kelsey Harris
MARINES	Bill Tyler
	Drew Cagle
	Nic Neufeld
	Christian Velasco

Act One

(Rosedale. A small town on the verge of fading entirely out of view. On stage are the shadows of buildings and trees, looming, broken, sinister. Wreckage strewn about. The scenes of the play take place scattered around the stage, carved out in pools of light. Various doorways, recessed into the edges of the city provide entrances and exits. At rise, the forestage is bare except a twin bed. ERYNNE, 17, lies on the bed stage left, writing in a journal. She wears dark, ragged clothing, many sizes too large. She wears heavy makeup and is drawn out to look as frightening as possible. Stage right, TRAVIS, 17, a skinny, unpretentious kid, holds a basketball and dribbles clumsily.)

ERYNNE *(to the audience)*

I live in a one-story ranch house in Rosedale—our neighborhood, when I was real small, used to be pretty good, but that was before people stopped mowing their lawns and started parking their cars on their yards. And that was before the creepy sex offender moved in two doors down who keeps his door open all day long—So he can keep an eye on the neighborhood and make things safe for his own brand of insanity. Anyway, we used to have a downtown, with a movie theatre and everything, and you could even get something to eat there, but eventually all the stores closed except for the Big Lots, which kind of gobbled up the other stores around it like some kind of cancerous octopus—and you know, I love the three-liter bottles of generic soda as much as the next guy, but do we really need the gigantic rolls of toilet paper? So the Big Lots sits there like the Tower of Sauron, this malevolent, oozing pimple on the face of the town, and I guess the rot just radiated from there, and so what we have left—what we have left… what we have left is a Wal-Mart, a Target, a whole selection of fast food restaurants, and a high school. If it were me, I'd just burn the whole place down and start over.

ERYNNE'S FATHER *(off-stage)*

Who are you talking to in there?!

ERYNNE *(shouting off)*

I'm on the phone!

ERYNNE'S FATHER *(off-stage)*

Get off the phone!

ERYNNE

Get off the couch!

(TRAVIS speaks to the audience, dribbling the basketball. He makes to take a shot.)

TRAVIS

I like it here. I mean some people have their problems with Rosedale, but really it's all right. I mean I guess it's the same as everywhere else. There isn't all that much to do. But um… anyway, it's home, you know? And that makes it cool. Not so much cool as safe. I was on the basketball team in eighth grade, which is where I learned to dribble. I played a grand total of fourteen minutes in our season. I took twenty-three shots in those fourteen minutes. I made two. Every time I touched the ball I would just… hurl it towards the basket, you know? And then I would run into people trying to get the rebound. I fouled out of three games. When we had our end of the year banquet, I got the award for most improved. But I hadn't really gotten any better, you know? I pretty much sucked in the beginning, I sucked in the middle, and I sucked hard-core at the end. So the coach gave me an award because I didn't end up quitting like they all wanted me to. My point in this is that I'm not really good at anything. My brother, on the other hand—

(NICK, 20, comes out from behind and steals the ball from TRAVIS. He dribbles around him. NICK is wearing desert fatigues.)

NICK

Oh!

(he acts like he's going to give him the ball back, then tosses it backwards off-stage. Pause. He stares at TRAVIS.)

You look like a retard.

TRAVIS

Shut up.

NICK

How do you stand to go outside like that?

TRAVIS

I manage.

NICK

Stand up straight.

TRAVIS

No.

NICK

Stand up straight. Do it. Do it or I'm gonna punch you in the face.

TRAVIS

Do it then.

(NICK goes to punch him. TRAVIS flinches.)

NICK

Two for flinching.

(NICK hits TRAVIS hard in the shoulder twice.)

TRAVIS

Ow.

NICK

Wuss.

TRAVIS

Shut up.

NICK

When are you gonna grow up?

TRAVIS

When are you gonna grow up?

NICK

I am grown up. Check this out.

(He flexes.)

Feel it. Go ahead feel it.

TRAVIS

I don't want to.

NICK

You're scared. Feel it. You know what this is? This is a muscle. Rock hard. This is what three months at Camp Pendleton does to you.

TRAVIS

I thought it made you an asshole <*jerk*>.

(NICK goes to punch him again. TRAVIS doesn't flinch.)

NICK

Oh! I was an asshole <jerk> before I went. They just helped me bring it out. You gonna sign up after you graduate?

TRAVIS

No.

NICK

Why not?

TRAVIS

Cause—

NICK

Cause you're a wuss.

TRAVIS

No.

NICK

Cause you're a wuss.

TRAVIS

Cause I'm going to college.

NICK

Marines'll help you pay for college. You're not a marine though. You'll never be a marine—you'll probably be like… expert toilet cleaner or something, you know? When there's a clog on the battlefield they'll call you in.

TRAVIS

You scared?

NICK

No. Quit asking me that.

TRAVIS

I'd be scared.

NICK

That's why Uncle Sam pays me to defend the country and he pays you nothing. Because he wouldn't take you—because you're a wuss.

(Lights switch back to ERYNNE. She has moved to the living room. Her FATHER sits on the couch, watching television, beer in hand.)

ERYNNE *(to the audience)*

My Dad… well, what to say about him?

ERYNNE'S FATHER *(at the television)*

Ah come on!

(He throws his empty beer can at the TV.)

ERYNNE

That's pretty much his main characteristic. When he saw something he didn't like, he threw something at it. Every once in a while he'd get really upset at something and he

ERYNNE *(continued)*

wouldn't be able to find something appropriate to throw, so he'd just kind of squirm around in the couch reaching for anything, like freaked out that something hadn't hit the television yet—if he could have thrown his own head at the TV, he would've. Actually, the screen of our TV used to be the only nice thing in the house, when he bought it, on credit, it was more expensive than his truck. But now it had all these dents and scratches in it—

ERYNNE'S FATHER *(at the television)*

What was that!?

(He looks for something, gets up a little, and tosses a pile of mail at it.)

ERYNNE

Yeah, he's a winner. He used to work as a contractor, but then something fell on him and his left arm is down to like forty percent motion or something like that—so he gets these disability checks and that's pretty much all he does. A whole lotta nothing. So my Dad's effectively like sixty percent of a human being—apparently he was like a pitcher when he was in high school—

(He throws something else at the television)

Which I guess explains the throwing stuff.

ERYNNE'S FATHER *(to ERYNNE)*

When did you get home?

ERYNNE

I've been home.

ERYNNE'S FATHER

What did you do in school today?

ERYNNE

Nothing.

(Pause. He goes back to watching the television.)

Nice talking to you, Dad.

(She starts to leave.)

ERYNNE'S FATHER

When are you gonna get some decent clothes?

ERYNNE

Give me money to go to the mall.

ERYNNE'S FATHER

Yeah, so you can go buy jeans that are already all ripped up.

ERYNNE

I don't wear ripped jeans.

ERYNNE'S FATHER

Or your crazy black parachute pants.

ERYNNE

They're not parachute pants.

ERYNNE'S FATHER

Plumber pants. Whatever. You look suicidal.

ERYNNE

Talk to you later, Dad.

(She leaves. Lights switch to TRAVIS and NICK.)

NICK

You got a girl?

TRAVIS

No.

NICK

Why not?

TRAVIS

I haven't met the right one yet.

(NICK laughs.)

NICK

Yeah, whatever. `I haven't met the right one yet.' Are you like quoting some stupid movie or something? Oh I'm waiting for true love. Have you ever had a girlfriend?

TRAVIS

Yes.

NICK

Liar.

TRAVIS

I'm not.

NICK

What was her name?

TRAVIS

Jessica.

NICK

You just made that up.

TRAVIS

No I didn't.

NICK

What was her last name?

TRAVIS

Walker.

NICK

What's her phone number?
(NICK takes out his cell phone.)
What's her phone number?

TRAVIS

She doesn't have a phone.

NICK

Is she like homeless or something? Did you go out with a homeless girl? Man, that's sad, was she liked passed out the whole time? Gimme the number.

TRAVIS

No.

NICK

You're such a liar. Look—let me give you some advice—you find a girl, it doesn't matter which one, any one, and buy some dinner or whatever—like Olive Garden, take `em someplace nice—

TRAVIS

Is that what you had to do?

NICK

No but I'm better looking than you. Girls bought me dinner.

TRAVIS

They did not.

NICK

Ashley… I don't even remember her last name—remember Ashley?

TRAVIS

The chick with all the acne?

NICK

It cleared up. She bought me dinner.

TRAVIS

She was just grateful cause she had such bad skin.

NICK

No. No—she was hot. All right forget Ashley—Tara, remember her? Tara was hot—and she bought me dinner—and then we made sweet, sweet—

TRAVIS

Great.

NICK

You know why? Check this out.

(He flexes again.)

Oh! Look at it. It's beautiful. You gotta go to the gym or something. What do you weigh? One thirty?

TRAVIS

No.

NICK

What do you bench?

TRAVIS

I don't know. One fifty.

NICK

Yeah right. Let me go get my weights—I wanna see this. I'm gonna put one fifty on the rack and I'm gonna watch you try it and we'll see what happens.

TRAVIS

All right, maybe less than that.

NICK

Maybe less. Maybe. Huh. Man you are such a wuss. I'm so ashamed that I'm related to you. You're like this ghost that warns me of what I could've been if I sucked a lot more.

TRAVIS

Shut up.

NICK

You embarrass me, man. What are you gonna do when I'm gone?

TRAVIS

Sleep better.

NICK

You sleep like twenty hours a day as it is.

TRAVIS

No I don't.

NICK

What do you got to be tired from, it's not like you actually do anything. Sit around—come home from school—play video games—eat—pee—play more video games—you don't have any friends, you don't have a girl, you're sad, man. You're pathetic. I'm glad I'm not you. You know what—when I come back—when I get home—you better not be this worthless piece of crap that I see right now—you know what I'm saying? Get out there. Talk to people. Go to the gym or something. I mean, if you're the future of America, it's pretty sad, you know? You are pretty sad.

TRAVIS

Sorry, I guess my life goal to please you hasn't been achieved.

NICK

That's right, make jokes. What do you think about that, huh? What do you think about the fact that you suck?

(He waits for a response.)

You haven't been thinking about that? Man, if I were you, that's all I'd think about.

TRAVIS

Have fun in Iraq.

NICK

I will. And when I get home—

TRAVIS

Yeah I know.

NICK

I'm serious, Travis.

TRAVIS

I hear Baghdad is nice this time of year.

NICK

It's gonna be nice when I'm through with it. Let me tell you something about the American army, all right, wimp? You know what these guys do to try and kill us? They can't actually show up, right? They can't actually say hey let's actually duke it out like men. No these guys are vermin. They put tiny little bombs on the side of the road, aimed to blow up underneath a hummer, where it's weak. And they put all kinds of stuff in there, nails, glass, anything, so that it will send as much crap flying as possible. And then they run away and they blend back in with the rest of the people: You know what that makes them? Wusses. Makes me wanna puke. Doesn't matter though, cause we're gonna exterminate `em. Make the world safe for Starbucks.

(Pause.)

TRAVIS

Hey um… don't get blown up.

NICK

I'm not gonna get blown up, man, they're gonna get blown up.

TRAVIS

Right.

NICK

Yeah, well, keep an eye on things around here, and stop being such a wuss. It's not good for ya. And it wouldn't hurt to get yourself a girl. That's an order, mister.

TRAVIS

Uh huh.

NICK

Bye.

TRAVIS

Bye.

(NICK leaves.)

(Lights switch to ERYNNE's bedroom. She's sitting on her bed listening to her headphones. There's a knock on the door. She doesn't hear it. Another knock. She still doesn't hear. There is a pounding on the door as someone tries to open it; it's locked.)

ERYNNE'S FATHER *(shouting)*

Open the door!

(he pounds on it.)

Open the damn door or I'm gonna kick it in! Erynne! Erynne!

(she finally hears him.)

Skipping Forward

ERYNNE

Leave me alone.

ERYNNE'S FATHER

Huh? Sit down.

ERYNNE

Go away.

ERYNNE'S FATHER

Sit down.

ERYNNE

No.

ERYNNE'S FATHER

What?

ERYNNE

Leave me alone.

ERYNNE'S FATHER

Sit your butt down.

(she stands there. He grabs her by the shoulders and throws her into a chair, standing over her.)

I'm gonna tell it to you straight. When you graduate, when you leave here, you are free to screw up your life—

ERYNNE

Dad—

ERYNNE'S FATHER

Listen to me. You are free to be a crack-addicted prostitute if you want—you are free to live on the streets and sell your body to get drugs if that's what floats your boat—but you're not doing it under my roof. And just cause I can't find anything right now doesn't mean it's not here—you understand? You understand where you're headed? And I'm gonna wash my hands of you. And then you're gonna come crawling back here one day, strung out, needing money, needing a place to sleep, and you know what I'm gonna do? I'm gonna laugh at you. I'm gonna shut the door in your face, because that's what you do to me every day. Look at me. Tell me where they are and I'll go easy on you.

(she doesn't say anything.)

ERYNNE'S MOTHER *(off-stage)*

Erynne!

ERYNNE'S FATHER

She's busy!

ERYNNE'S MOTHER *(off-stage)*

Your friends are here!

ERYNNE'S FATHER

Tell them to go away!

ERYNNE

Tell them to come up!

(no response from below. He gets off of leaning on the chair.)

ERYNNE'S FATHER

So what are you gonna do with your friends?

ERYNNE

Hang out.

ERYNNE'S FATHER

You're grounded. You're not going anywhere.

ERYNNE

Since when?

ERYNNE'S FATHER

Since right now.

ERYNNE

For what?

ERYNNE'S FATHER

For the lock on the door.

ERYNNE

I'm not grounded.

ERYNNE'S FATHER

Yes you are.

ERYNNE

You're not gonna stop me.

ERYNNE'S FATHER

You try anything and—

(SCOOTER, 17, CHUBB, 16, and TRANK, 18, enter. They come in a jovial mood. All three look like typical goth children, with the exception of SCOOTER, who is so weird that he seems strange even in comparison to the others.)

CHUBB

What's up?!

(They stop when they see her Father.)

TRANK

Hey Mr. O'Neill.

ERYNNE'S FATHER

Why can't you dress like normal people?

TRANK *(overlapping)*

Because we don't want to.

CHUBB *(overlapping)*

This is normal.

SCOOTER *(overlapping)*

Normal people scare me.

ERYNNE'S FATHER

You know one of these days you're gonna have to get a job. And it's all fun and good that you can walk around wearing—what is that, a dog collar? Are you a dog?

CHUBB

Bark bark.

ERYNNE'S FATHER

What is wrong with you? Huh? You see what happens when you walk into an office wearing that.

TRANK

I have a job.

ERYNNE'S FATHER

Where do you work?

TRANK

At a Christian Youth Ministry.

(Pause. ERYNNE'S FATHER doesn't know what to say.)

ERYNNE'S FATHER

Are you supposed to be Chubb?

CHUBB

Um… I think so.

ERYNNE'S FATHER

Why are you called Chubb?

CHUBB

Cause I'm so fat.

(he looks at her quizzically.)

It's ironic. I'm filled with irony. Do you know what irony is?

ERYNNE'S FATHER

Erynne's grounded. She's not going anywhere. And I want you people out of my house in thirty minutes or I'm calling the cops.

(he leaves)

CHUBB *(calling out after him)*

Hey one of these days you're gonna have to stop being a total—<*asshole*>

(he comes back fast.)

ERYNNE'S FATHER

What was that? You wanna tell that to my face?

CHUBB

No.

ERYNNE'S FATHER

I didn't think so.

(he waits there, looking at them. Then he leaves. They shut the door.)

CHUBB

Picking on a sixteen year-old girl. Yeah, you're tough.

ERYNNE

I'm sorry guys.

CHUBB

Not your fault.

TRANK

Is it me or does your Dad become more of a jerk every day?

ERYNNE

I don't think it's you.

SCOOTER

He scares me.

TRANK

Yeah, whatever.

SCOOTER

He's like a demon.

ERYNNE

He's not a demon, he's my Dad.

SCOOTER

You don't know that. He could be a demon. He could be possessed. Perhaps we should perform an exorcism on him.

ERYNNE

Is there a reason you guys brought Scooter over? Cause he's freaking me out.

CHUBB

We're looking after him. He just kinda found us.

ERYNNE

Okay. Where's Nemo?

CHUBB

I don't know, he's your boyfriend.

TRANK

We were gonna go look for him. His cell phone's off.

ERYNNE

He probably lost it again.

CHUBB

Probably.

ERYNNE

I'm grounded, though.

TRANK

Who cares?

ERYNNE

No I really can't go.

TRANK

What's he gonna do, call the police?

SCOOTER

He might have magical powers. He could put a curse on you.

ERYNNE

Right.

TRANK

We just go out the window.

(He opens the window.)

Come on. Chubb, lock the door.

ERYNNE

Guys.

CHUBB

Don't you wanna see Nemo?

ERYNNE

Yeah.

TRANK

Come on. What else are you gonna do? Sit here and get yelled at by your Dad?

ERYNNE

All right.

(CHUBB, TRANK, and ERYNNE go out the window. SCOOTER remains in the room. He gets under the covers in the bed and goes to sleep.)

(Lights switch back to TRAVIS, in school. Several students sit in the class, including KIMBERLY, 17, blonde and beautiful. He sits directly behind her. MISS WINDHORST, 45, is at the imaginary blackboard. The ANNOUCNEMENTS are on.)

MISS WINDHORST

All right quiet!

ANNOUNCER

Good morning Rosedale High School. These are your morning announcements. Please pause for a moment of silence.

MISS WINDHORST

Quiet!

(ERYNNE enters, hurrying.)

MISS WINDHORST

That's your third tardy Erynne.

ERYNNE

Oh come on. I had to talk to the counselor.

MISS WINDHORST

Couldn't you do that after school?

ERYNNE

I'm having severe mental problems.

ANNOUNCER

All right, let's remember all the people out there fighting for our freedom. They sure are doing a good job. First up: The Math Club is meeting today after school in room 212. Today's discussion topic: The Quadratic Formula. So you better read that before you show up or you won't be allowed into the room. Today's meeting for guys who want to beat up math nerds is in room 212 after school.

(Short pause.)

I'm just kidding about that guys.

MISS WINDHORST

All right guys, open your books to page—

ANNOUNCER

This is from the wrestling team: There are still openings in the squad, so guys, if you want roll around and get sweaty with another guy wearing a leotard… no wait, that's not what it says here. If you want to join a team of exciting physical competition, stop by the auxiliary gym today after school.

(Pause.)

MISS WINDHORST

We were talking about George Washington's retreat from New York—

ANNOUNCER

And it's about time to get tickets for the Homecoming Dance. So, guys out there, if you're totally obsessed with the blonde girl sitting in front of you and you wish to God that she knew who you were, now's about the time to ask her to the dance and get shot down and be miserable for the rest of the year because you're a hopeless loser. But remember, even if she shoots you down the first time, you still have the opportunity to be idiotically in love with her for the rest of the year and get shot down a few more times because you have this stupid hope that she's going to change her mind. She's not going to change her mind, guys, she doesn't like you.

(Pause. TRAVIS looks up.)

MISS WINDHORST

This was quite a defeat for—

ANNOUNCER

And that's all we have for today. Remember: Be healthy, happy, and full of pep. Go Wildcats.

(He makes a growling sound.)

MISS WINDHORST

He had lost quite a few of his men in the battle, so he was left, really, with a skeleton crew.

ANNOUNCER

One more thing, the girls' soccer coach is still looking for a manager. So if you want to be around a bunch of… Anyway, they're looking for a manager.

(NEMO, 18, a ragged-looking yet charming punk kid, darts into the classroom and crouches next to ERYNNE. He is passing a note to her.)

MISS WINDHORST

Excuse me?

NEMO

It's really important.

(to ERYNNE)

So what are you up to tonight?

ERYNNE

Not much.

NEMO

You should come on over.

ERYNNE

Okay.

MISS WINDHORST

What is your name?

NEMO

Names are just labels we give to things we don't understand.

(back to ERYNNE)

I'll see you around eight, all right?

ERYNNE

Cool.

MISS WINDHORST

I'm trying to teach a class here.

NEMO

You can go ahead and teach the class, I'll be quiet.

MISS WINDHORST

Leave, please.

NEMO

You're looking very nice today.
(to ERYNNE)
What's her name?

ERYNNE

Miss Windhorst.

NEMO

Miss Windhorst.

MISS WINDHORST

Leave.

NEMO

Do you think I'm a bad kid?

MISS WINDHORST

I don't care.

NEMO

You don't have to be rude about it.

MISS WINDHORST

Erynne, is this your friend?

NEMO

I don't know that girl at all. She's just some skank that's trying to seduce me.
(MISS WINDHORST is trying to escort NEMO out.)
Whoah, whoah, come on. What if I just wanted to sit in on the class? Acquire some learning? You're interfering in my education.

MISS WINDHORST

Do you even attend this school?

NEMO

Occasionally.

(She tries to push at him.)

NEMO

Hey. Hey. Ow.

(She pushes him.)

That's assault. You guys all saw that. You just assaulted me, I'm going to sue. What if I fell into something sharp…

(he tries to fall into something sharp.)

And ruined my face, you know? I could be scarred for life. I would never work again. I'd be injured—it would all be your fault.

MISS WINDHORST

Get out.

NEMO

Geez, why didn't you just say so? You don't have to be such an old b—

(He stops, then smiles.)

You know I was going to call you a bitch <*biyatch*> but then I stopped myself.

(He leaves. MISS WINDHORST takes a moment to de-tense.)

MISS WINDHORST

Okay, where were we? Washington's army—

(The Bell rings. The kids get up instantly. TRAVIS tries to stay near KIMBERLY.)

TRAVIS

Hey Kimberly.

KIMBERLY

Hi.

(Pause. She's leaving.)

TRAVIS

How's it going?

KIMBERLY

All right.

(Pause. She leaves. TRAVIS speaks to the audience.)

TRAVIS

Kimberly Lee Waluschka. To say that I was madly in love with her from a distance is something of an understatement because I lived next door—well, actually, she moved in about three months after we did—I already knew her, and I already had a crush on her, but when I found out she was moving in next to us, something snapped in my tiny little mind. I mean, it was like, suddenly I was obsessed. Suddenly I was making anagrams out of her name and counting the syllables to try to figure out if we destined for each other.

TRAVIS *(continued)*

I managed to sit behind her in American History, which pretty much consisted of me staring directly into her back and fantasizing about diving into a swimming pool filled with her hair.

Homecoming. The dance. The important dance, and I knew she wasn't going out with anyone and here was my chance. I volunteered to mow their lawn, and I'd make sure to do it without my shirt on, and I'd do a whole bunch of push-ups before I went out there to make sure I was bulked up and everything, so when I mowed she'd see me and be so moved by my sunburned, scrawny physique that she would fall in love with me. Needless to say, that hadn't worked just yet. Sometimes I'd even go out there and throw a Frisbee to myself, you know toss it up in the air real high so she could see how athletic I was? That was… that hadn't quite succeeded yet either. So of course I figured that the best way to ask her to the dance, even though I lived next door, was to call her on the phone.

(TRAVIS moves back into his home. He picks up the phone. We hear it ringing three times. TRAVIS paces, takes deep breaths, and stretches his mouth while he waits for it to pick up.)

JESSIE'S VOICE

You've reached the Waluschkas. No one is available to take your call right now—what? What? Shut up I'm trying to do the answering machine message! Well I don't know—go look in your room—I hate you!

(The tone sounds. He hangs up, then hits himself in the head with the phone. He calls again, breathing once more. The machine picks up.)

JESSIE'S VOICE

You've reached the Waluschkas. No one is available to take your call right now—what? What? Shut up I'm trying to do the answering machine message! Well I don't know—go look in your room—I hate you!

(The tone sounds again.)

TRAVIS

Um… hi… uh… Kimberly, it's Travis, and I was wondering if you got the History homework today, so… uh… give me a call.

(He sets the phone down.)

That was Wednesday.

(Lights switch to the classroom. He sits behind KIMBERLY in class, staring at her. The bell rings.)

TRAVIS

So um… hey.

KIMBERLY

Hey.

(Pause. TRAVIS tries to think of something to say.)

TRAVIS

Did you get that message last night?

KIMBERLY

Yeah.

TRAVIS

Oh.

(Pause. TRAVIS is back to the audience.)

Thursday night.

(He calls up.)

JESSIE'S VOICE

You've reached the Waluschkas. No one is available to take your call right now—what? What? Shut up I'm trying to do the answering machine message! Well I don't know—go look in your room—I hate you!

(it rings.)

TRAVIS

This is a message for Kimberly. This is Travis… um… from next door. I was wondering if you were… doing anything right now cause I was thinking that maybe you could help me with history… so… uh… give me a call.

(back to the audience)

So that was Thursday. And then there was Friday.

(TRAVIS hangs up and stares at the phone. It rings. He goes to pick it up, then stops, letting it ring twice. He picks it up.)

Hello?

(Click.)

A star sixty-nine revealed that it had come from Kimberly's house.

(he dials again.)

JESSIE'S VOICE

You've reached the Waluschkas. No one is available to take your call right now—what? What? Shut up I'm trying to do the answering machine message! Well I don't know—go look in your room—I hate you!

(The machine rings.)

TRAVIS

Oh. Uh—just wondering if you called. So—uh—it's Travis. Next door. Bye.

(he hangs up. Stares at the phone.)

So that was Friday. Which also happened to be the night my Dad decided to leave us.

(Lights switch to ERYNNE, in the wreckage of some place. NEMO sits nearby.)

ERYNNE

When I was twelve, my older sister Dierdre was killed in a car accident. It wasn't exactly an accident. Her and her friends were car surfing, which is where one kid gets on top of

ERYNNE *(continued)*

the car and either stands up or just holds on as they drive around like crazy. And so they were doing this in the park, and I guess some of her friends had gone already—and I never really knew if she was drunk or not while she was doing this, but I guess she probably was, anyway, they went around a corner and she rolled off and hit her head on the pavement really hard—cracked open her skull, left part of her brain on the road—the doctors thought they'd be able to save her life for a while, just that she'd have some permanent brain damage from the… you know, from the leaving part of her brain on the pavement—I guess you expect to not be all that all right when they're picking little pebbles out of your skull—but the surgeon who was in charge of putting her brain back together screwed up and she died on the operating table. My Mom sued. The case was dismissed. We ended up with nothing. So, anyway, now I'm an only child—so… so there it is.

(she turns to NEMO)

So there's life and there's death, you know? There's a legend… about a woman named Dierdre… well I mean, like we're Irish and everything, and Dierdre was supposedly the most beautiful woman on the whole island—

NEMO *(to her)*

She probably smelled all Irish fresh and everything.

ERYNNE *(to NEMO)*

But anyway, she was so beautiful that people kept on fighting over her and killing each other in order to kidnap her. So finally this guy kills her true love and takes her away to be with him. But instead of being his wife, Dierdre kills herself by smashing her head on a rock repeatedly.

I think about that. About having the guts to be able to do that. I mean, to not just hit yourself once, but to do it again and again… and maybe that's what happened to my sister… maybe she had just had enough—of this place, of the ruin, of this slow crumble.

NEMO

You want a beer?

ERYNNE

No.

NEMO

What's wrong?

ERYNNE

My parents are freaking out on me.

NEMO

Join the club.

ERYNNE

They're talking about boarding up my windows. Or putting me in rehab.

NEMO

That sucks. They're not gonna put you in rehab, though, that costs money. Your parents are too cheap.

ERYNNE

Yeah, no kidding.

NEMO

You know what would make you feel better? Making out.

ERYNNE

Shut up.

NEMO

It'd make me feel better.

ERYNNE

What am I gonna do, though?

NEMO

About your parents, I don't know. Can we talk about something else?

ERYNNE

Why are you being a jerk?

NEMO

What do you mean? Every single day I gotta listen to this. Every single day your parents are freaking out on you, and I listen, and I listen all the time, but come on… let's have some fun, we can't do anything about it.

(Pause. ERYNNE is hurt.)

That upsets you? All right, all right, I'm sorry.

ERYNNE

It's not my fault.

NEMO

Okay.

ERYNNE

Just… you ever wonder how we got this way?

NEMO

What way?

ERYNNE

I don't know—I just—today I was looking in the mirror, and… I remember what I used to look like, when I was a kid, when I felt… cleaner somehow you know? And then I look at me now and it's just… strange to see what's happened to me.

NEMO

What's happened to you?

ERYNNE

I got all mean. I mean, that's kinda it. There's just this—like the air… irritates me, you know? Like all the time I got like tiny little fires exploding on my skin and I just can't ever get peaceful any more, you know?

NEMO

Take a bath.

ERYNNE

Why do I even bother talking to you?

NEMO

Cause I'm sexy.

ERYNNE

Shut up.

NEMO

Seriously, check this out.

(he poses.)

ERYNNE

Nemo, I'm serious. Stop it for a second!

NEMO

You're always serious! That's what your problem is.

ERYNNE

I'm not asking you to tell me what my problem is—

(TRANK jumps in carrying bolt clippers. He screams violently. Both of them freak out.)

TRANK

I will eat your flesh!

NEMO

Ah you skank!

(TRANK falls into convulsive laughter. NEMO attacks TRANK as he laughs.)

TRANK

Ah man that was hilarious! You're like Aaaaah!

ERYNNE

Yeah, gee, I guess when somebody jumps out of the bushes holding a machete I tend to overreact!

TRANK

Does this look like a machete to you? These are bolt clippers, dumb-ass <*moron*>.

ERYNNE

Piss off. <*Shut up*>

TRANK

Oh, I'm chopping my way through the forest! Look at me with my machete!

NEMO

What do you have them for?

TRANK

Dude. Check this out. If you go to the back lot behind the hospital they have an entire tank of nitrous there. So I'm thinking, we take Chubb's mini-van, we go to the back, we sever the thing—pop it in the back… we'll be out of our minds for a month.

NEMO

You want to steal a tank of nitrous from the hospital?

TRANK

Dude, yes. I can already feel the brain cells dying, there's gonna be some kind of like… cranial holocaust going on in here, man. Eat nitrous! Dude, I'm gonna be like a vegetable. Ahhh!

ERYNNE

All right, I'm out.

TRANK

What's wrong with you?

ERYNNE

Did you ask Chubb if you could use the mini-van?

TRANK

Nah, I just took it. What? She lets me use it all the time.

NEMO

I think we'd better think this one through a little better, Trank.

TRANK

Skipping Forward

(The lights change. JESSIE and her gang of little friends, KALLIE, LILY, MORGAN, and DANICA slowly emerge. They look at TRAVIS strangely.)

TRAVIS

Hey.

(they laugh.)

KALLIE *(mimicking him)*

Hey.

TRAVIS

So uh… what's up?

KALLIE

How's that chest hair coming?

(all the girls giggle.)

TRAVIS

What?

KALLIE

Jessie says you're trying to grow chest hair.

DANICA

You wanna play spin the bottle?

TRAVIS

How old are you? Twelve? I'm seventeen.

DANICA

I'm not twelve. I'm thirteen. Are you scared?

KALLIE

When was the last time you kissed a girl?

TRAVIS

Like, the police will bust down the door and haul me off to jail.

DANICA

Don't you think love is worth it?

KALLIE

Do you love Kimberly?

MORGAN

He totally does.

TRAVIS

No.

KALLIE

Why are you over here then?

MORGAN

Cause he loves Kimberly!

DANICA

She doesn't even like you.

KALLIE

Yeah, she's not all that impressed by the chest hair.

(They all laugh again.)

MORGAN

What do you think about Jessie?

KALLIE

Do you think Jessie's hot?

DANICA

She thinks you're hot.

KALLIE

Shut up! You weren't supposed to tell him that!

DANICA

Whatever.

KALLIE

She's gonna kill you.

TRAVIS

You know what guys—if Kimberly's not here, then you know what—I'm gonna take off—

KALLIE

No no no she's here.

DANICA

She's coming right down.

(the girls laugh again.)

MORGAN

Sit down.

TRAVIS

No thanks.

MORGAN

Sit down or we're gonna come over to your house.

KALLIE

We're totally coming over to your house.

DANICA

We're gonna ring the doorbell at like three in the morning.

KALLIE

We totally know where you live.

TRAVIS

That's nice, guys.

(he tries to leave. KALLIE grabs him.)

KALLIE

No wait wait—

DANICA

She's coming right down.

(the girls giggle again.)

MORGAN

What radio station do you listen to?

TRAVIS

All right, you know what—

DANICA

Do you listen to 105.1?

MORGAN

He totally does.

KALLIE

He does not. 98.5.

(JESSIE comes back down, having changed clothes and put on a lot of makeup.)

JESSIE

You know what, I can't find her.

TRAVIS

Well just tell her—

KALLIE

That you love her?

DANICA

Shut up!

TRAVIS

All right, you guys have a nice night.

JESSIE

Where are you going?

TRAVIS

I'm going home—okay—

JESSIE

You know Kimberly doesn't have a date for homecoming yet—

KALLIE

Oh! You should totally ask her to homecoming!

DANICA

Yeah, that's gonna work.

MORGAN

He should.

DANICA

You're retarded.

MORGAN

Unnnh.

DANICA

Shut up.

TRAVIS

I should really go home.

KALLIE

What are you gonna do there?

MORGAN

You got a hot date tonight?

TRAVIS

No.

KALLIE

Then stay here.

JESSIE

You know what, Kimberly just ran to the store, she's gonna be right back.

TRAVIS

Really?

JESSIE

Uh huh. Stick around for her.

(Pause. He considers it.)

TRAVIS

All right.

(He sits down. Lights shift.)

(ERYNNE is sneaking into her house late at night. Her FATHER is laying in wait. She tries to make it around the corner but he flips on the lights.)

ERYNNE

Ah!

FATHER

Sit down.

ERYNNE

Dad—

FATHER

Sit down.

(she sits.)

Bring me your coat.

ERYNNE

You just told me to sit down.

(he flips over a piece of furniture.)

FATHER

Don't get smart with me!

(ERYNNE cringes.)

Get your coat.

(ERYNNE goes to the closet, brings back her coat. Her FATHER snatches it from her. He begins rifling through it.)

ERYNNE

Hey!

FATHER

Shut up.

(ERYNNE shuts up. Her FATHER dumps everything out of her pockets—he finds cigarettes, three lighters, a baggie filled with something organic, a condom, etc…He lays each thing out on the table.)

Cigarettes. One lighter. Two lighters. Three lighters.

(He gets to the baggie.)

Which one of your friends are you getting this from?

(she doesn't say anything.)

Which one. Your boyfriend. Him? You're gonna talk to me or you're gonna talk to the police, you got it?

ERYNNE

I didn't get it from him.

FATHER

Who then?

(he leans in again.)

All right listen to me. You may not think so, but this is dangerous. This destroys your brain. And you ain't got that much to start with.

ERYNNE *(under her breath)*

I'm still smarter than you.

FATHER

What was that?

ERYNNE

I'm smarter than you.

(The FATHER grabs her by the shoulder.)

FATHER

You know what I think about you right now?

ERYNNE

I got a pretty good idea.

FATHER

You're lucky I don't throw you through the wall. You know when I think about what I raised for a daughter it makes me sick.

ERYNNE

Can we please talk when you're not drunk out of your mind?

(he explodes in anger, shaking her.)

FATHER

You got some nerve! You think I'm an alcoholic?! Is that what you tell people?! When you're running around with those drug addicts? You think I don't know what you do? You know what's gonna happen to you! You're gonna end up on the street—you got no ambition, you got nothing.

(Short pause)

ERYNNE

Dad—

FATHER

I want you out of my house. I want you gone.

(He pushes her.)

Get that garbage out of your room. See how well you do living on your own.

(The lights change back to the basement. Very late at night now. Everyone is still downstairs. DANICA has fallen asleep.)

KALLIE

She's asleep. Shhhh…

(KALLIE begins to pile pillows on top of DANICA. The others help.)

TRAVIS

But like I'm saying—you gotta… realize, you know, life—

JESSIE

Yeah.

TRAVIS

Here's the thing: my brother—you know, he thinks he's a big shot just because he's a marine, you know? And I mean, that's cool and all—but—

MORGAN

He's a marine?

TRAVIS

Yeah.

MORGAN

Wow.

TRAVIS

Okay, that doesn't like… you know in my family, my parents are miserable. They drive each other nuts, and my Dad is like totally running around on my Mom—and that's just kind of the way it's been for years, you know?

LILY

I think about death all the time.

(Pause. People stop to look at LILY.)

You wanna hear a poem I wrote?

(the girls nod.)

I see darkness all around me
I feel the cold grip of black pain
The sting of my shattered dreams
Outside, the rain falls on us all.
And I scream quietly from the corner.

JESSIE

Wow.

LILY

Did you guys like it?

MORGAN

You should totally make that a song.

(KIMBERLY comes down the stairs. Everyone freezes. She looks at TRAVIS.)

(Pause.)

KIMBERLY

What are you doing here?

TRAVIS

Hey.

KIMBERLY

It's two o' clock in the morning, what are you doing in my house? With my little sister?

TRAVIS

I was uh… I was waiting for you actually.

(he gets up from the floor where he was sitting.)

KIMBERLY

Do Mom and Dad know he's over here?

JESSIE

We're going out.

TRAVIS

What?

KIMBERLY

Are you kidding me?

TRAVIS

Hey—whoah—no—she's lying—

JESSIE

I don't want to lie any more, Travis.

TRAVIS

Hey wait no—

KIMBERLY

This is disgusting.

(she leaves, Travis races after her.)

(Outside.)

TRAVIS

Kimberly—

KIMBERLY

You're a pervert.

TRAVIS

She's making that up—she called me and said you were home—

KIMBERLY

Well obviously I wasn't.

TRAVIS

Right. Yeah, I should've picked up on that a little sooner. But—look—I'm not going out with your sister—come on—she's got a crush on me or something.

(KIMBERLY looks at him.)

I came over here… because… do you have a date for homecoming?

KIMBERLY

What?

TRAVIS

Um… would you like to go to homecoming with me?

(Pause. TRAVIS turns to address the audience.)

TRAVIS

This is the point in the movie of my life where my character is able to come up with an unexpected burst of eloquence, and is in fact so eloquent that the girl has no choice but to fall in love with the hero, even though she's a lot hotter and more popular than him and really doesn't even know he exists. So, my speech, in the movie version, went something like this:

(back to her)

I think about you all the time. And I think about me being with you. And I think about these guys you've been with: Greg, and Sam, and that other guy who was twenty-two years old and still lived at home. And I watch you every day, and I know that they've been awful to you, I know that they've used you, and cheated on you, and treated you like dirt, and that makes me sick inside because I know that you're a diamond, and you should be treated tenderly and cleanly and with respect, and I would be the guy who would open doors for you and pull out your chair and bring you flowers unexpectedly—and I would do my best to make you happy, to share my inside with you, to share my thoughts with you, to hear your thoughts and to listen to you, to really listen, so that I knew who you were on the inside instead of just the outside like these jerks you've been with. I would be the guy that would make sure you got home okay, I would massage your shoulders when you were stressed, I would help you with your homework when it was hard—and I would thank God for the joy you would bring into my life. And if you want that kind of guy instead of some creep, then please, for all that is holy, go with me to the homecoming dance.

(to the audience)

It came out something like this:

(to her)

Cause um…

KIMBERLY

Travis. I think we should just be friends. Okay?

TRAVIS

Okay.

KIMBERLY

You gotta go.

TRAVIS

See you tomorrow.

KIMBERLY

Good night.

TRAVIS

Night.

(He leaves. Stops, turns around to look at her. Then keeps going. She enters the house. Inside TRAVIS' house, his FATHER waits, pacing like a caged animal.)

TRAVIS' FATHER

Hey Travis.

TRAVIS

What are you doing up so late?

TRAVIS' FATHER

What are you doing out?

TRAVIS

I was just next door.

TRAVIS' FATHER

Doing what?

TRAVIS

Hanging out with a bunch of middle school girls.

(His FATHER looks at him strangely.)

They were surprisingly cool.

TRAVIS' FATHER

Travis.

(He's about to give some fatherly advice, but isn't quite sure how to approach the subject.)

I know you've been having difficulty with girls your own age, but that doesn't mean you have to slide down the ladder, you know what I'm saying?

TRAVIS

Is Mom up?

(Pause.)

TRAVIS' FATHER

I'm gonna leave your mother.

(Pause.)

After her birthday I'm gonna go out to California. And I'm not coming back.

TRAVIS

California?

Skipping Forward

ERYNNE'S MOTHER

I used to like who you were. I don't like you now. And what hurts me is you don't want me to like you. You deliberately try to be like this. I… love you, Erynne. But we don't love what you've become. And we have tried for two years to change that, and, I think it's time to face the reality that you're not going to change. Because you don't want to change.

ERYNNE

That's right.

ERYNNE'S MOTHER

Then we don't want you to be our daughter.

(Pause. The FATHER holds on to the MOTHER. She starts to cry.)

ERYNNE *(breaking)*

What… does that mean?

ERYNNE'S MOTHER

You have to leave.

ERYNNE'S FATHER

We've tried… treatment and that doesn't work cause you don't want it to, so… so we can't do this any more. So you need to go.

ERYNNE'S MOTHER

I love you.

(she makes a move to reach out, but the FATHER holds her back.)

(Lights shift.)

TRAVIS *(to audience)*

My mother's birthday came and went but he didn't leave. He stayed. And he was miserable. And I think he was having an affair somewhere cause he'd be gone for long stretches at a time, but I didn't really know for sure. So every day I came home wondering if my Dad was still going to be there. And looking at my Mom and wondering if I should tell her what he told me.

(Lights shift to the kitchen. TRAVIS is helping his mother make dinner.)

TRAVIS' MOTHER

Do you want corn on the cob or potato salad?

TRAVIS

Potato salad.

TRAVIS' MOTHER

Too bad. I already started the corn on the cob.

TRAVIS

Then why'd you ask?

TRAVIS' MOTHER

Habit. Do you want cole slaw or baked beans?

TRAVIS

Either.

TRAVIS' MOTHER

Okay.

TRAVIS

Mom?

TRAVIS' MOTHER

What?

(Pause.)

TRAVIS

Where's Dad?

TRAVIS' MOTHER

He's running errands. He should be home soon.

(Pause. She stops to look at him.)

What's wrong?

TRAVIS

Nothing. I'm just worried about global warming. Do you really think the icecaps are going to melt?

TRAVIS' MOTHER

I don't know honey. I try not to think about it. The world has been here for a long time and every couple of years they come up and say this new thing is going to be the worst disaster in human history. And you know what? Life goes on. So I wouldn't spend too much time worrying about it.

TRAVIS

Okay.

TRAVIS' MOTHER

When I was growing up it was nuclear war. And trust me, that's a lot scarier than having hot summers or the sea level going up a foot or two. That was a real problem, trust me.

TRAVIS

Yeah.

TRAVIS' MOTHER

I was always sure the end was just around the corner. Of course, it wasn't.

TRAVIS

What if it really was just around the corner? What if we're at the end?

TRAVIS' MOTHER

Then end of what?

TRAVIS

The end of the world.

TRAVIS' MOTHER

We're not at the end of the world.

TRAVIS

What if something horrible happened? And then um… and then… what if that something was kinda small—like—

TRAVIS' MOTHER

Like what?

TRAVIS

Like what if Dad left?

(Pause. They look at each other.)

TRAVIS' MOTHER

What did he tell you?

(Pause. TRAVIS' FATHER enters carrying two bags of groceries.)

TRAVIS' FATHER

Hey Travis, go get the rest of the bags out of the trunk.

(He sets the groceries down and begins unloading them.)

TRAVIS

Okay, Dad.

(he leaves. TRAVIS' MOTHER and FATHER look at each other.)

TRAVIS

For many years I wondered what they said to each other when I was getting the bags out of the trunk. But that was the last day they were together. My father left for California that night—he packed some of his stuff together and took the car—And while I was gone, I imagine it went something like this:

TRAVIS' MOTHER

When were you planning on telling me you were thinking of leaving me?

TRAVIS' FATHER

Terri, I—

TRAVIS' MOTHER

Have I gotten too old?

TRAVIS' FATHER

No.

TRAVIS' MOTHER

Was there something I should've done?

TRAVIS' FATHER

My heart isn't in it.

TRAVIS' MOTHER

In what?

TRAVIS' FATHER

In this. In this family.

TRAVIS' MOTHER

How long has it been like that?

TRAVIS' FATHER

Since the beginning.

TRAVIS' MOTHER

Your heart hasn't been in it for twenty-three years?

(Pause.)

And you never felt like telling that to me?

TRAVIS' FATHER

I didn't want to hurt you.

(Pause. She sits down. TRAVIS comes back in with the groceries. Neither of his parents says anything. He begins unloading groceries.)

TRAVIS

Do these go in the fridge?

TRAVIS' MOTHER

…yeah.

(she leaves. TRAVIS' FATHER remains for a moment, then heads out in the opposite direction)

ERYNNE

I spent four days living in Chubb's `87 Plymouth Voyager. Powder Blue. Like the color of the sky. She managed to sneak me a couple of blankets out of her house, cause it got really cold at night, and even though I wanted to, we couldn't run the car at night so there was no heat. And I would wake up at seven and hide until her parents left for work, then I would sneak into Chubb's house and take a quick shower so I could go to school. Not that I really wanted to go to school, but at least things there were kinda normal. Chubb's parents were not going to be cool with some druggie girl living out of her car, and on the fourth day her Dad snuck outside to smoke a cigarette and he spotted me. So that was the end of living with Chubb. Trank lived with his Mom, but she was freaking crazy, so I couldn't really stay there; Nemo was my first choice of course—

NEMO

I don't think so.

ERYNNE

Oh come on. Just for a little while. It'll be fun.

NEMO

Erynne—

ERYNNE

I'll live in your closet.

NEMO

No.

ERYNNE

I'm serious, I'll like hide in there and no one will ever know I'm here. I'm real quiet, I'll just make like, little growling noises when I want some food.

NEMO

Why don't you just go home?

ERYNNE

They kicked me out.

NEMO

Well go back and apologize or whatever—they have to take you back in. They can't just kick you out—

ERYNNE

They said if I go back again they're going to hand me over to Juvie or something—

NEMO

They are not.

ERYNNE

I can't go back there.

NEMO

They can't just turn you out on the street—go to the police—

ERYNNE

Yeah, that's gonna happen.

NEMO

Well you can't stay here.

ERYNNE

Why not?

NEMO

You just can't.

ERYNNE

I'll be quiet—

NEMO

Erynne! Listen to me… You cannot stay here. I don't want you to stay here.
(Pause. She's hurt.)
I didn't mean it like that—

ERYNNE

Yeah you did.
(She starts to leave.)

NEMO

Erynne.

ERYNNE

Fine I'll sleep on the street. That's what you want anyway.

NEMO

That's not what I—You're being ridiculous.
(she spins on him.)

ERYNNE

What! Why don't you want me here?!

NEMO

I didn't think we were that serious—

ERYNNE

What the heck does that mean?

NEMO

Well what if we broke up?

ERYNNE

We're not gonna break up!

NEMO

But what if we did? What would you do?

ERYNNE

Stop getting off the subject!

NEMO

You'd probably fall down and die. I mean, look at you, we've only been going out five months and already you're like, we're gonna get married or whatever, or you want to move in with me—

ERYNNE

I was kicked out of my house! This isn't a vacation!

NEMO

And you keep pushing and pushing for us to do all this stuff together all the time—I can't be there all the time for you, okay? I know that you want me to, but you can't lean on me every second of every day, and if you were living here then that's all it would be—all the time, okay, you just… you just… you need help, that's all, and it's not something I can give to you.

ERYNNE

So basically what you're saying is that you want all the physical stuff without having to listen to me talk. Is that it?

NEMO

No.

ERYNNE

Screw you.

NEMO

That's not what I'm saying!

(She leaves.)

(ERYNNE crosses the stage to CHUBB as the lights shift.)

ERYNNE

This is totally a bad idea.

CHUBB

Just for a week. Then we'll figure something out.

ERYNNE

He's really weird.

CHUBB

I'm aware of that. Have you met his family?

ERYNNE

No.

(CHUBB rings the doorbell. ROHAN, SCOOTER's older brother, opens it. ROHAN has long, flowing black hair and wears a cape of some kind. He's absolutely terrifying.)

ROHAN

Yes?

ERYNNE

Hi. Um… is Scooter home?

ROHAN

He dwells within.

(ROHAN sweeps aside his cape to let them enter.)

Scooter! Your companions have arrived!

(ERYNNE and CHUBB sit down on a couch. ROHAN sits opposite them.)

CHUBB

Hi.

ERYNNE

Hey.

(ROHAN simply stares at them.)

CHUBB

So… um… it's just you and your brother living here?

ROHAN

Our sister as well.

CHUBB

Oh! Cool—
(she nudges ERYNNE a little.)

ERYNNE

What?

CHUBB

How old's your sister?

ROHAN

Many moons.

CHUBB

Right. So what's your name again?

ROHAN

I am known as Rohan.

CHUBB

Like in the Lord of the Rings?
(he glares at them.)
Sorry.

ESMERELDA *(off-stage)*

Billy! Get your butt back in here and clean up the dishes!

ROHAN

My servants shall do it!

ESMERELDA *(off-stage)*

Don't make me come in there and slap you!

ROHAN

I must away.
(He gets up with a sweep of his cloak)

ESMERELDA *(off-stage)*

This is gross, Billy!
(They can be heard arguing off-stage.)

ERYNNE

I'm not staying here.

CHUBB

He's totally fine

ERYNNE

What are you talking about? He makes Scooter look like the well-adjusted one! I don't even want to meet their sister!

(off-stage she shrieks something particularly vile.)

CHUBB

Erynne. They will take you in.

ERYNNE

I'm going to be infected with whatever brand of crazy lives here. I mean, look at this gene pool. No wonder their parents split.

CHUBB

Just for a week, okay? Then I'll get something figured out.

(SCOOTER enters.)

SCOOTER

You found me.

CHUBB

Yes, we tracked you down.

SCOOTER

You met Rohan.

ERYNNE

Yeah. He's a treat.

SCOOTER

Be careful. He's a warlock.

ERYNNE

All right, it was nice talking to you Scooter—

(she gets up to leave. CHUBB grabs her.)

CHUBB

Scooter. Erynne got kicked out of her house by her demonic parents—can she stay here? She'll be really quiet.

ERYNNE

Actually, don't worry about it—

SCOOTER

We have an extra room.

CHUBB

Oh. See?

SCOOTER

It's haunted.

CHUBB

That's fine. She loves haunted stuff.

SCOOTER

We've been trying to capture the ghost for many months now—but it is eluding us.

CHUBB

Well, yeah, you know, that happens. Erynne?

ERYNNE

I can't pay any rent or anything.

SCOOTER

We get checks from the government.

CHUBB

Hey all right!

ERYNNE

What do you get checks from the government for?

SCOOTER

I think it has something to do with mental health.

ERYNNE

Makes sense.

CHUBB

So are you gonna stay?

ERYNNE

Sure.

SCOOTER

Let's have a party. We'll invite all our friends.

ERYNNE

Maybe later. Hey—hey… Scooter, thanks.

SCOOTER

Glad to help.

(Lights shift. ERYNNE addresses the audience.)

ERYNNE

So then there was Esmerelda. Based on my impressions of Scooter and his lovely brother Rohan, I had a mental picture of Esmerelda that was somewhere between a hard-core cultist and a teletubbie. I kind of imagined her wobbling out of the kitchen, lit-up from within by some translucent screen filled with flashing images, all the while spouting off about the power of magic and her own spells which she would cast upon the evil-doers. The reality, however, was a little off.

(ESMERELDA, 23 sits on the couch next to ERYNNE. She seems completely normal in comparison to her siblings.)

ESMERELDA

You want some tea?

ERYNNE

No thanks.

ESMERELDA

You're friends with Scooter?

ERYNNE

I don't know that I'd say friends.

ESMERELDA

What would you say you are then?

ERYNNE

Basically acquaintances who are friendly.

ESMERELDA

Right. You may have noticed that my brothers are a little strange.

ERYNNE

Yes. Yes I have.

ESMERELDA

We're really not all that related.

ERYNNE

Oh.

ESMERELDA

They're adopted.

ERYNNE

Oh. You guys got a great deal on that.

ESMERELDA

They were kind of left on our doorstep.

ERYNNE

Oh. That was a nice present.

ESMERELDA

And my parents took them in.

ERYNNE

Where are they now?

ESMERELDA

Well… about the time that Billy started calling himself Rohan and holding séances in our backyard, they found more and more excuses to be out of the house. Until finally, they just stopped coming back.

(Lights switch. TRAVIS is in his bedroom, on the phone with NICK.)

NICK

What's up?

TRAVIS

Nothing.

NICK

You got a girl yet?

TRAVIS

I asked out Kimberly.

NICK

Kimberly who?

TRAVIS

Our neighbor.

NICK

Are you kidding me? You dumb-ass <*moron*>.

TRAVIS

What?

NICK

She's not gonna go out with you. Be serious.

TRAVIS

Why not?

NICK

Because she's hot, that's why. You need to find some ugly girl to go out with. Find a fat one. They appreciate guys who think they might be gay.

TRAVIS

I'm not gay.

NICK

No, that's cool, you don't need to convince me. I know. It's the girls you gotta convince.

TRAVIS

I'm not gay.

NICK

Fine. So she said no, right?

TRAVIS

She said she wanted to be friends.

NICK

Uh-huh. And has she done a lot of friendly things since then?

TRAVIS

No.

NICK

She doesn't want to be friends. She wants you to never talk to her again. You should go after her little sister—

TRAVIS

She's like thirteen.

NICK

So? She'd go out with you. That's about the best you can hope for right now. Go down to the middle school. Sniff around a little bit.

TRAVIS

You're disgusting.

NICK

Whatever. You been working out?

TRAVIS

A little.

NICK

No you haven't. That's all I do here. You know I can bench two sixty now?

TRAVIS

Really.

NICK

Seriously.

TRAVIS

So… uh… how is it?

NICK

Sucks. The whole place smells like boiling garbage. It's a hundred and twenty degrees today. You know what they got here for natural resources? Sand. It doesn't rain here, sand just blows in outta the desert—sucks. Just as soon go home.

TRAVIS

I thought you were gonna make it a resort community.

NICK

Right. Yeah well that plan has been put on hold until the whole place stops reeking like a dead dog that's been lying in a pile of filth for two weeks. Why anyone lives here I don't know. The best thing to do would probably be burn the whole place down and start over. Put some decent roads in—find some water, I don't know, put in a golf course. We went golfing the other day.

TRAVIS

You did not.

NICK

They got this course here—Saddam's private course—so of course they opened it up to Americans, and we're out there—the thing hasn't been watered in a year so it's like, this brown, ragged mess, right, and there are rocks everywhere and the whole thing sucks—like, how are you gonna golf in this, you know? So we're out there, me and a couple of other guys, and we're just hacking away at our balls—next thing you know, I go to hit the ball, and boom! Mortar shell lands about two blocks from us. I'm not kidding you. And

NICK *(continued)*

I'm like, these dumb bastards <*idiots*> are trying to blow up their own golf course—so I start waving my clubs and I'm like, over here, retards!

TRAVIS

What did they do?

NICK

Nothing. They fire one shot then they gotta move cause we track `em down.

TRAVIS

Oh. So… um… how're you doing?

NICK

I miss America, man.

TRAVIS

Really?

NICK

Oh dude, let me tell you. You don't know how good you got it over there. People around the rest of the world—I mean it's like medieval times over here—these people, you know, they worry about how they're gonna eat, they're worried about how many children they got and if they should get rid of some—and all the time their minds are filled with madness and they hate our guts, not all of `em, not all of `em, but I pass kids on the street, ten, eleven-year old kids, and they just stare at you, you know? They see the uniform, they see the armored vehicle, and they go home and live in rubble and they want us dead, man. For no reason. They want us dead because they want someone to pay for what's happened to them. And man, it's like, you wanna reason with them, you wanna say, `hey, you know why things are such a crazy mess right now?' it's cause of you, it's cause of your family, it's cause of the people blowing things up left and right trying to kill as many people as possible. That's why life is misery, you know? So you go through that, every day you go through that, kids, girls, spit at you. They got eyes like coal, they got voices like they're on fire, and that's every day—every day you see that, for no reason at all. We live like kings in America, Travis. Kings.

TRAVIS

When are you comin' home?

NICK

Six months. That's what they say anyway. Hopefully things will keep quiet for a little while and I can get out faster. How're Mom and Dad?

(Pause.)

TRAVIS

Fine.

NICK

Yeah?

TRAVIS

Yeah, they're fine.

NICK

Good. Tell `em I love `em, all right?

TRAVIS

Yeah.

NICK

All right—and stop being such a wuss.

TRAVIS

I got it.

NICK

I'll talk to you later.

TRAVIS

Hey Nick?

NICK

Yeah?

TRAVIS

Stay safe out there okay?

NICK

No problem.

(he hangs up. Lights shift, but remain on TRAVIS. ERYNNE is in a solitary room, looking around, quite disturbed. In the far distance, chanting is heard.)

TRAVIS

I laid awake that night—

ERYNNE

I listened to the sounds of the highway that ran past the front door. In the haunted room I found myself in, and I thought about all these things—that I wasn't good enough, that I wasn't going to make it, that life was just too hard—

TRAVIS

I heard my mother downstairs, she was still up, she was up still going through those albums, wondering what had happened to her family. Was it all a lie? Was all that time we spent together a fraud?

ERYNNE

I want to burn down the world. I want to burn it up—explode, fire the whole thing, just to let it know that I'm here, and say that I am better than this. This is not me. This wasted, messed-up girl is not all that I am—I am more than this. I am a person—I am a light.

TRAVIS

I walked down the stairs—it was a warm fall night—we had all the windows open and you could smell the heat as it seeped in from the outside, and the soft purr of the crickets, and the flutter of insects against the lights—and here we are, so safe—

ERYNNE

So angry, those self-satisfied bastards, just because I don't fit into what they think I should be, just because I'm not exactly like everyone else. I should tear out their hearts for this.

TRAVIS

I thought about my brother on the other side of the world. In the middle of some blinding heat, walking down some shattered road where people had no hope, where they toiled and they burned and they were close to death at all times, and I thought about my life here, in between the Wal-Mart and the McDonald's and the ribbons of highways cutting through the night—

ERYNNE

My sister was the same as me. She was just like me. She lived, she burned, she was burning all the time—

TRAVIS

But none of us are safe—my father proved that—

(TRAVIS reaches his mother.)

(ERYNNE gets up from the bed and begins walking.)

ERYNNE

So I went out for a walk on the side of the highway. Down the road, not even really caring where I walked to. And sometimes cars would flash their brights at me, sometimes they would slow down, just to see this girl alongside the highway, in the ditch, walking.

TRAVIS

And I think about America, and how we were once expected to all put ourselves in danger, and now we don't, now most of us are fat and lazy and cozy, like babies, and

Skipping Forward

ERYNNE

Are you in heaven?

DIERDRE

Do you want me to be in heaven? Would it make things better for you?

ERYNNE

I don't know.

DIERDRE

I can't give you that answer.

ERYNNE

Why not?

DIERDRE

Really I'm just a figment of your imagination.

ERYNNE

Oh.

DIERDRE

At least I think so. I'm not really all that sure.

ERYNNE

Dierdre?

DIERDRE

Yeah?

ERYNNE

Was it this hard for you?

DIERDRE

No.

(switch over to TRAVIS and his MOTHER. The phone rings.)

TRAVIS

A little late.
(TRAVIS' MOTHER answers the phone.)

TRAVIS' MOTHER

Hello? This is Terri.
(she sits down slowly.)

TRAVIS

Mom?

(She drops the phone.)

Mom?

(Music. Meatloaf. "For Crying Out Loud.")

Are you okay?

(ERYNNE and DIERDRE are together.)

ERYNNE

I miss you.

TRAVIS

What is it?

TRAVIS' MOTHER

Nick.

(End of Act One.)

Act Two

(Music. ERYNNE is creeping around the outside of her house. Inside, her MOTHER and FATHER are on the couch, watching television. She finds her window and tries it. It's locked. She waits outside for a moment, unsure of what to do.)

ERYNNE'S MOTHER

Do we have to watch this show?

ERYNNE'S FATHER

Yes.

ERYNNE'S MOTHER

It's not funny.

ERYNNE'S FATHER

Did I ask you?

ERYNNE'S MOTHER

Gimme the remote control.

ERYNNE'S FATHER

No.

ERYNNE'S MOTHER

Give it to me.

ERYNNE'S FATHER

You don't have to watch TV.

ERYNNE'S MOTHER

Every night we gotta watch this crap. What is so wrong with you that you find Pamela Anderson entertaining?

ERYNNE'S FATHER

She's funny.

ERYNNE'S MOTHER

You just want to stare at her boobs.

ERYNNE'S FATHER

Ah, you got me. We're still watching it.

ERYNNE'S MOTHER

It's stupid.

ERYNNE'S FATHER
Then go in another room. Nobody wants you in here.

ERYNNE'S MOTHER
Fine I'm going in the kitchen.

ERYNNE'S FATHER
That's a good place for you.

ERYNNE'S MOTHER
You know what Brad? Kiss my butt.

ERYNNE'S FATHER
No.

ERYNNE'S MOTHER
Fine. I'll be in the kitchen.

ERYNNE'S FATHER
I heard you the first time.

ERYNNE'S MOTHER
Some day, when you're dying of cancer and you can't talk any more, I'll be there in the hospital room, and you know what I'm gonna do? I'm gonna change the channel to Lifetime and leave it there. You got it? Television for Women. On your deathbed.

ERYNNE'S FATHER
That'll kill me pretty quick.

ERYNNE'S MOTHER
Good. Then I can have the remote.
(She leaves.)

ERYNNE'S FATHER
Hey get me a beer!

ERYNNE'S MOTHER *(in the kitchen)*
Get your own beer!
(ERYNNE rings the doorbell.)

ERYNNE'S FATHER
That's the doorbell.

ERYNNE'S MOTHER
Do you think I'm deaf?

ERYNNE'S FATHER

Get it.

ERYNNE'S MOTHER

Yeah that's gonna happen. Get off your own lazy butt and answer the door.

ERYNNE'S FATHER *(calling out)*

It's open!

(ERYNNE opens the door tentatively.)

ERYNNE

Hey.

(They look at her. Pause.)

ERYNNE'S MOTHER *(softly)*

What do you want?

(Pause. She stares at them.)

ERYNNE

I wanna come home.

(her FATHER signs deeply and looks at her MOTHER.)

ERYNNE'S FATHER

Um…

ERYNNE'S MOTHER

Do you want something to eat?

ERYNNE

No.

ERYNNE'S FATHER

Why do you wanna come home?

(She shrugs.)

Tell me why.

(ERYNNE squirms a little bit.)

ERYNNE

I'm sorry.

ERYNNE'S FATHER

That's not a reason.

ERYNNE'S MOTHER

Brad.

ERYNNE'S FATHER

No no, I wanna hear this. If she wants to come back here, she can tell us why. You were pretty eager to leave the first time—

ERYNNE

I was not!

ERYNNE'S FATHER

By your actions, you made it clear that you didn't want to be here.

ERYNNE

I never said that I didn't want to be here!

ERYNNE'S FATHER

If you wanted to be here, you'd follow our rules.

ERYNNE'S MOTHER

Can we turn this stupid show off now?

(She goes for the remote. ERYNNE'S FATHER takes it and shuts off the television.)

ERYNNE'S FATHER

You understand what I'm saying?

ERYNNE

No.

ERYNNE'S FATHER

Well. Why should I let you come back then?

ERYNNE

I'll be good.

ERYNNE'S FATHER

I don't know that I believe that.

ERYNNE

Well what do you want?!

ERYNNE'S MOTHER

Don't scream.

ERYNNE

You want me to live on the street?!

ERYNNE'S MOTHER

Sweetie, are you—

ERYNNE'S FATHER

Gail.

ERYNNE

Why do you shut her down like that? Why can't you just let her talk? You're such an asshole.

ERYNNE'S FATHER

All right, you know what? It's time for you to go.

(he gets up from the chair.)

ERYNNE

Why can't you just let me talk to you?!

ERYNNE'S FATHER

Talk! Go ahead talk! No one's stopping you! Why should I take you back in!?

ERYNNE

Because I—

ERYNNE'S FATHER

When you were here, you didn't respect me, you didn't respect your mother—you and your friends treated this house like your own little drug den, you stole from us, you took money from your mother, you didn't obey our rules, you cussed at us, you skipped school, I've paid fines for you, every day since you were fourteen you've been a complete mess and it hurts me, you understand that? It hurts me because I sit back and think what did I do wrong with you that you're so… vicious and mean and angry, that you are… a blot on this family—it makes me sick to my stomach to look at you and think that you are my *only* child! You understand that?! You make me sick coming in here dressed like that with your hair all putrid, wearing all that black, with that attitude that the world sucks and that your only role in it is to get what you want and screw everyone else! I'm sick of it! You understand! So you *explain* to me why on earth I would want you to live under the same roof as me. Why should I spend my money to feed you, to buy you black clothes, to keep you warm, to keep you safe, when all I ever get from you is hate and spit and pain!

(Pause.)

Well?

(ERYNNE gets up and heads deeper into the house.)

Where are you going?

ERYNNE

I'm gonna get my stuff!

(he grabs her by the arm.)

ERYNNE'S FATHER

What stuff?

ERYNNE

Let go of me!

ERYNNE'S FATHER

What stuff!

ERYNNE'S MOTHER

Brad. Let go of her.
(he looks at her MOTHER, but doesn't let go.)
Sweetie, what do you need?

ERYNNE

Well I just need to check on some stuff.

ERYNNE'S MOTHER

We went through it, and…

ERYNNE'S FATHER

We got rid of it.
(Pause. ERYNNE slides away from him and slumps to the ground.)

ERYNNE'S MOTHER *(to her FATHER)*

Why did you say that?

ERYNNE'S FATHER

Gail.

ERYNNE *(quietly)*

Why…?

ERYNNE'S MOTHER

Well…

ERYNNE

Did you do that immediately? Did you just go through my stuff that night and trash everything? Why would you do that?

ERYNNE'S MOTHER

You have to understand—

ERYNNE

You never thought I was going to come back for it?

ERYNNE'S MOTHER

We saved what we thought was important, okay?

(ERYNNE'S FATHER shoots her a look. ERYNNE'S MOTHER tries to touch her on the shoulder, but ERYNNE jerks away from the contact, slapping at her hand.)

ERYNNE'S FATHER

Erynne. We were looking for drugs.

ERYNNE

I didn't have any. And that doesn't give you a right to destroy my things.

ERYNNE'S FATHER

We needed to be thorough. Now listen—

(she kicks at him.)

All right, time for you to go. Get up.

ERYNNE

I'm not going anywhere.

ERYNNE'S FATHER

Get up.

ERYNNE

Screw you.

ERYNNE'S FATHER

That's it.

(He grabs her roughly and forcibly pulls her to her feet.)

You want me to call police?

ERYNNE

Go ahead and do it. I'll tell them all about you.

ERYNNE'S FATHER

You're leaving.

ERYNNE

Go ahead, call them. Call the police. I'm gonna report you anyway for throwing me out—you can't just kick me out of the house—that's child abuse—They're gonna put you in jail.

(He's pulled her just about all the way to the door.)

Why do you think I'm messed up, huh? You think I don't know I'm messed up? You think I want to be like this?

(He opens the door and shoves her roughly. She spits in his face. Enraged, he goes to strike her, but stops.)

ERYNNE'S FATHER

Don't come back. You're an animal. You hear me?

(he slams the door. ERYNNE waits for a second, then kicks the door. ERYNNE'S FATHER waits on the other side of it.)

ERYNNE *(shouting through the door)*

Mom! Mom! You let him do this! You let him!

(Inside, ERYNNE'S MOTHER makes a move toward the door, then stops. Outside, ERYYNE kicks at it again.. Slowly, she leaves, not looking back. Lights change.)

(The music of a military band. The MINISTER, middle-aged, steps forward, carrying a bible.)

MINISTER

I had the pleasure of knowing Nicholas for quite a few years. I first met him in his confirmation training when he was thirteen, and I watched him as he matured from a typical thirteen year old boy to a young man of character and strength. And it is an honor to be here today to remember this young man, who gave his life for us.

Nicholas died when his vehicle was struck by what is known as an IED, an Improvised Explosive Device. We would call it a roadside bomb. They strike randomly, the young man who built that device did not know him; the young man who planted it in the road would not recognize him. Perhaps had they met under different circumstances, Nicholas and this young man who killed him, would have been friends.

I ask myself many questions. I ask the same questions his family asks. Why does God permit war? Why take Nicholas? What purpose does this serve? For as long as humans have had the ability to think they have asked these questions. They ask them now, they asked them in Germany, they asked them on a hill near Jerusalem when another young man gave his life so that his friends might be saved. His name was Jesus Christ.

God has made us, on this earth, mortal. From the moment we are born, we are on a path to this day. When the flowers are laid out for us, when our family gathers to remember our soul. Our souls, though, are eternal. That is God's promise. That is why that other young man gave his life. Nicholas is not gone, he lives on in you, and he lives with our Lord in heaven.

I know this about the young man. When we send our soldiers off to war, we send our best. I know this to be true about him because I spoke with him before he left—he was not afraid—we send young men who believe in the responsibility of the strong to protect the weak, we send young men who believe in their duty to this country, who believe in honor, and morality, and peace. We do not send killers. We send our sons, and our brothers, and our fathers and even our sisters and daughters and mothers, and all those who would be willing to sacrifice themselves so that those of us here in America, whose memory of war on our own soil is nearly forgotten, so those of us here might keep safe. And whatever you might say about this war, our men that see to its fighting give us hope. And the price for that hope, sadly, is blood. Amen.

(Bagpipe music. The funeral procession gathers. TRAVIS stands with his MOTHER. KIMBERLY and JESSIE stand nearby, dressed in black. TRAVIS' FATHER stands opposite them, alone. Others are there as well.)

(Slowly, four MARINES in dress uniform carry a flag-draped coffin onto the stage. They set the coffin down and remove the flag, folding it ceremonially. One MARINE pivots and hands the folded flag to TRAVIS' MOTHER.)

(TRAVIS' FATHER walks toward his mother, head down. He puts his hand on her shoulder.)

(Three sharp rifle reports. A MARINE in dress uniform plays Taps on the bugle.)

(Other members of the funeral approach TRAVIS' MOTHER and FATHER to offer their condolences. TRAVIS backs away from them, watching. After a moment, JESSIE comes over to him.)

JESSIE

Hey.

TRAVIS

Hi.

(She hesitates for a moment, then gives him a hug.)

(Lights shift back to their home. TRAVIS' MOTHER is sitting down, nearly catatonic. TRAVIS sits near her. After a moment, TRAVIS' FATHER knocks tentatively on the door, then enters.)

TRAVIS' FATHER

Can I come in?

(no real response from TRAVIS' MOTHER. His FATHER steps in.)

You gotta think the timing of this is pretty bad, huh?

TRAVIS' MOTHER

How's California?

TRAVIS' FATHER

It's all right. I'm renting a little place near the beach. The water's pretty cold yet, you know? I tried to go swimming the other day and I nearly froze to death.

TRAVIS' MOTHER

You got a job?

TRAVIS' FATHER

Still looking.

(short pause)

TRAVIS' FATHER *(continued)*

How're you doing, Travis?

(no response)

Yeah. It's pretty bad. Umm… His commanding officer said some pretty nice things.

TRAVIS

That was his drill sergeant.

TRAVIS' FATHER

Right.

TRAVIS

His commanding officer is still over there.

TRAVIS' FATHER

Yeah. That makes sense. Uh… Travis? Do you think uh… you could let your mother and me talk… for a little bit?

(TRAVIS looks to his mother.)

TRAVIS' MOTHER

It's okay.

TRAVIS

All right.

(TRAVIS gets up from the couch and exits. Lights follow him. He speaks to the audience.)

TRAVIS *(to the audience)*

The sun was going down when I got outside. And I thought about what Nick had said to me, all that stuff about finding my place in the world, or finding some way to make a mark, and I hadn't done any of it. I hadn't made a single mark. Even at the funeral I wasn't all that important—not that many people really paid much attention to me. And it occurred to me that all I was really, was just a hole. Just an empty spot. And then I thought, I can't even believe that all I'm thinking about right now is myself. Maybe that's why I'm nothing. The whole world just goes on around me—my mom and dad are in there, hashing it out, my brother's in the ground, and I'm out here whining about the fact that I'm uncool. If I was really a good person, I'd be crying about Nick, but I'm not. I was the last person to talk to him, he even told me he was worried, in his way, and I remember during that conversation that I wanted to cut it short cause there was a good TV program coming on.

(KIMBERLY and JESSIE enter, heading towards their house. TRAVIS looks at them. KIMBERLY waves, then goes inside. TRAVIS waves a little back as JESSIE comes over.)

JESSIE

Are you doing okay, Travis?

TRAVIS

I'm fine.

JESSIE

That suit looks good on you.

TRAVIS

It's actually Nick's.

JESSIE

Oh—I'm sorry.

TRAVIS

Nah, it's all right, it doesn't fit him any more.
(short pause.)
I mean, it didn't fit him.
(Pause.)

JESSIE

So what are you doing tomorrow night?

TRAVIS

I don't know. Nothing.

JESSIE

We're having a sleep-over. You wanna come?

TRAVIS

To a sleep-over?

JESSIE

Well I mean it's… it's a very sophisticated sleep-over. It's more like a party really.

TRAVIS

Is your sister gonna be there?

JESSIE

Why do you care?

TRAVIS

Just wondering.

JESSIE

I don't know. She's going out to a party tonight or something.

TRAVIS

Where?

JESSIE

Why do you like her?

TRAVIS

I don't like her that much.

JESSIE

You're like totally obsessed with her. And she doesn't even know you exist.

TRAVIS

She knows I exist.

JESSIE

She knows you exist in the way she knows cockroaches exist. As long as they stay hidden in the dark and don't come around where she can see them, she's fine with it. I mean I guess that's okay because you're lurking in the bushes and all—

TRAVIS

That was one time. I lost my Frisbee—

JESSIE

Yeah you're out there throwing your Frisbee to yourself and you "accidentally" toss it into our bushes—

TRAVIS

I was not doing that on purpose—

JESSIE

Whatever. I'm just saying it's kinda sad. Most people try to play catch with at least one other person. But you got your own thing going.

TRAVIS

I was practicing—

JESSIE

Listen, let me tell you something about Kimberly. She's never going to go out with you. You know what Kimberly thinks about all day? Her hair. And her clothes. Her entire brain is filled up with that; it's like a warehouse for the mall. Okay? And you know who's she gonna go out with? Some guy just like her past nine boyfriends who has a car and money and does some kind of sport where he hurts people. That's her life. And you don't wanna be part of it, trust me.

TRAVIS

You don't know her—

JESSIE

What?! I'm her fricking sister! Have you ever talked to her?

TRAVIS

Yes—

JESSIE

About more than the weather?

TRAVIS

I talk to her all the time—

JESSIE

About homework? Leaving those sad little messages on our answering machine? What do you think she does when she hears those? First she tries to remember who you are, and then she rolls her eyes and deletes them. Okay?

TRAVIS

Well she called that one time—

JESSIE

I called. I called you.

TRAVIS

What for?

JESSIE

To make you stop leaving those stupid messages! God. You know I used to think my sister was dumb, and now I'm realizing that everyone's dumb. Maybe you two should go out. Look—she's not going to be at my party, okay? She's got other superficial-wench-type-things to be doing.

TRAVIS

How old are you again?

JESSIE

Fourteen. Practically.

TRAVIS

Aren't there any other practically fourteen year old guys you could invite instead?

JESSIE

They're all idiots. Seriously. On medication. Part monkey. Retarded.

TRAVIS

Okay, but like… I'm seventeen, okay?

JESSIE

Yeah, but you're immature for your age.

TRAVIS

Sorry.

JESSIE

You had fun last time—

TRAVIS

No I didn't—you guys tormented me the whole time.

JESSIE

Yeah but that's fun.

TRAVIS

Listen, Jessie, you are a very nice girl—and there are probably lots of guys your age—

JESSIE *(overlapping)*

But they're retarded!

TRAVIS

Who would love to go out with you—

JESSIE

Wait a minute, wait a minute! I'm not asking you out!

TRAVIS

Okay, fine.

JESSIE

I can ask you over to a party without asking you out.

TRAVIS

Okay, fine, you're not asking me out.

JESSIE

If I was asking you out you'd be lucky because I'm a lot hotter than any girl you're going to get—

TRAVIS

I don't know about—

JESSIE

And I'm only getting hotter. I mean, a year or two—you're going to be creeping over in the bushes trying to look into my bedroom—

TRAVIS

I *lost* my *Frisbee* in the *bush*!

JESSIE

Keep saying that and it might become true.

TRAVIS

It is true.

JESSIE

You know what, Travis? I might be the only person who will ever say this: but I think you're pretty cool. So come over if you want, but… if you ever need someone to actually catch that Frisbee, let me know, all right? So…

(TRAVIS' FATHER exits the house.)

I should go.

TRAVIS

What?

JESSIE

I'm sorry about your brother.

(she gives him another quick hug.)

Bye.

TRAVIS

Bye.

TRAVIS' FATHER

What's her name again?

TRAVIS

Um…

(realizes he doesn't know it.)

Jessie, I think.

TRAVIS' FATHER

Isn't she a little young for you to be hanging out with?

TRAVIS

Yes. Yes she is.

TRAVIS' FATHER

Oh.

(Pause.)

TRAVIS

How's Mom doing?

TRAVIS' FATHER

She's been better.

(short pause.)

You wanna sit down?

(TRAVIS looks around, seeing nowhere to sit except the curb.)

TRAVIS

Where?

TRAVIS' FATHER

Yeah. Yeah I guess. Uh…

TRAVIS

Are you coming home? For good?

TRAVIS' FATHER

Well that's one of the things your mother and I talked about.

TRAVIS

She misses you a lot.

TRAVIS' FATHER

I know.

TRAVIS

And I miss you.

(Pause.)

And it's really kinda mean what you've been doing.

TRAVIS' FATHER

When you're older—

TRAVIS

I understand now.

TRAVIS' FATHER

You can say that, but I don't think that you do.

Skipping Forward

TRAVIS' FATHER

She will survive. There are times in this life when you have to deal with pain, and we all have pain right now, but the response, Travis, isn't to curl up into a corner and hope that someone saves you. The response is to be strong and deal with it and live your life. And that's what I'm doing.

TRAVIS

What do you think Nick would say about that?

TRAVIS' FATHER

I think Nick would be stronger than you. I think he would understand.

TRAVIS

You're a coward. And you wreck his memory by this.

(Pause.)

TRAVIS' FATHER

Travis, I'm sorry that Nick died. I'm sorry this had to happen. I'm sorry that I had to leave. But I did not do this because of a whim, I did this because it was time, and I had to do it. And you're the one who needs to take care of your mother now, because you're all she's got. And she loved your brother very much, and I loved your brother very much, but we all deal with pain in different ways. And you need to help her. Because I can't.

TRAVIS

You won't.

TRAVIS' FATHER

I can't.

TRAVIS

You're running away from this. I don't care what you say, deep down you know you're just running away and hoping someone will clean up this mess. And by leaving you say that you don't care about me—

TRAVIS' FATHER

I care about you—

TRAVIS

You wouldn't do this if you cared. You wouldn't do this if it were me instead of him…

TRAVIS' FATHER

What do you mean by that?

TRAVIS

You know what I mean.

TRAVIS' FATHER

You want me to say I loved him more?

TRAVIS

It's true, isn't it?

TRAVIS' FATHER

No. It's not. I love you both.

TRAVIS

Say that all you want, but we both know it's true. I know what you think of me. You got one son who's a hero and one who's just there. I know the difference between me and him. Why are you leaving now, that he's gone? You're leaving cause you don't want anything to do with us, like you're caught in a beartrap and you're sawing off you own leg to escape.

TRAVIS' FATHER

I love you and your brother the same—

TRAVIS

You can't even say that convincingly.

TRAVIS' FATHER

Travis—

TRAVIS

Go on, get out of here. If you're leaving, if you need to escape so badly that you can't even stick around to help out after your favorite son's funeral, go ahead. I feel sorry for you. Because you gotta live the rest of your life being you. And I'm happy because I get to live the rest of my life being me. And one of these days, when you're in your crappy little California apartment, and you're lonely, and you got no life, and you got a crappy job, and you think about running on back here to see if we still need you: We won't. We won't need you. And you're going to be stuck out there lonely and sad and miserable because you had love in your life and you trashed it. So get out.

(pause.)

TRAVIS' FATHER

I didn't kill Nick. And I'm sorry that you think I loved him more than you—and you know what, if we're being honest here, maybe I did. And I don't know if that's something I can help or what.

TRAVIS

You know what Dad? It doesn't matter that you had more love for him, all that matters is that you have so little of it for me.

TRAVIS' FATHER

I'm sorry.

(He starts to leave.)

TRAVIS

No you're not.

(TRAVIS' FATHER looks back for a moment, then exits.)

(TRAVIS stands there. Lights shift.)

(Loud, angry music far away. ERYNNE enters.)

ERYNNE

The thing is: I don't really hate myself. You know, I mean that's what people think. They see someone like me, and they see me now, and they think, that girl hates herself. She's got self-esteem issues.

I don't hate myself. I'm afraid. I'm afraid of the future. I'm afraid of my future. And that's something that keeps me up at night, and I wake up, terrified, not of the darkness, but of the growing unease with the world around me. And so somehow, all of this, all of this piling on top of me, I feel like I'm underwater, and the whole world is burning around me. And I want to join in with the flames.

(The music gets louder.)

So I went to this party. Cause what else are you gonna do?

(ERYNNE drifts to the side as the party forms around her. TRANK is visible first, carrying in a tank of something. Others emerge from different areas of the stage. NEMO, CHUBB, SCOOTER, ESMERELDA, and others. KIMBERLY stands near the back, talking with her friend, KATIE. Both seem somewhat disgusted and thrilled by the situation. ERYNNE is on the periphery, unnoticed by the others.)

TRANK

Check this out!

CHUBB

Praise Jesus!

TRANK

Hey, hey, shut up with that. I'm serious.

CHUBB

Whatever.

TRANK

Who's house is this anyway?

NEMO

My cousin's.

CHUBB

Where are they?

NEMO

They're gone for the weekend.

TRANK

Sweet.

(He picks up something and throws it.)

NEMO

Come on, show a little respect.

TRANK

Sorry.

(he throws something more respectfully.)

What? Had to be done, man.

(They set about getting things ready. KIMBERLY speaks with her friend.)

KIMBERLY

You didn't tell me this was gonna be druggie party.

KATIE

It's not.

KIMBERLY

Look at these people. They're freaks.

(TRANK is eating something disgusting.)

KATIE

Do you know that guy, Nemo?

KIMBERLY

I've seen him before.

KATIE

Just chill out all right, it'll be fine.

(SCOOTER approaches them. He stands there looking at them, not saying anything. They try to avoid him by moving away. He follows.)

KIMBERLY

Excuse me? Do I know you?

SCOOTER

Do you want to know me?

KATIE

Hey I know you! Your name's Brian, right!

SCOOTER

Scooter.

KATIE

No, your name's Brian! We went to Elementary School together! Oh—Dude, look at you, you're totally messed up now! You must've been doing tons of drugs!

SCOOTER

I was once known as Brian.

KATIE

Yeah—we had homeroom together. Remember me? Katie?
(he looks at her strangely.)

SCOOTER

Yes.

KATIE

Oh wow. So what's going on?

SCOOTER

I need your help.
(He closes in on them.)
I just received a disturbing phone call.
(He pauses for effect.)
Have any of you ever heard of the Evil Time Computer?
(Pause.)

KIMBERLY

No.

SCOOTER

It is a device created in the future, which has achieved sentience—

KIMBERLY

What?

SCOOTER

Sentience.

KIMBERLY

Oh. That.

SCOOTER
And with its sentience it has determined that human beings are to be exterminated.

KIMBERLY
Isn't that the plot of Terminator?

KATIE
So wait—the evil time computer called you on the phone?

SCOOTER
Yes. To mock me.

KIMBERLY
Hey Katie maybe we should go over there.

KATIE
You know that's not a bad idea—
(They try to leave, but SCOOTER stops them.)

SCOOTER
Just so you know. I may need to love you tonight.
(Pause. KIMBERLY and KATIE move in separate directions.)

KIMBERLY
Okay. That's nice. Bye.
(They escape. More people enter.)

TRANK
Hey! Come on in!
(ESEMERELDA approaches SCOOTER.)

ESMERELDA
What did I tell you about talking to strangers?

SCOOTER
A stranger is just a friend you haven't met.

ESMERELDA
A stranger is someone who's going to put you in a mental home.

SCOOTER
That's where they want me.
(NEMO finds KIMBERLY.)

NEMO

What's up?

KIMBERLY

Not much.

NEMO

Your name is…

KIMBERLY

Kimberly.

NEMO

Right. You're a prep, right? No, that's cool. No judgments. It takes all kinds.

KIMBERLY

Right. What's your name? Nemo? Like the fish?

NEMO

Yup. I was the original though. Actually I'm Captain Nemo.

KIMBERLY

Oh you're a captain?

NEMO

Yeah. So look, are you here to have a good time or what?

KIMBERLY

What do you mean by that?

NEMO

Whatever.

KIMBERLY

Not with you.

NEMO

Look at that, I'm not even saying anything, and you've got this attitude all of a sudden. No that's cool, you just go around and enjoy my house and drink my drinks and make yourself at home, all right? Try not to be an ungrateful skank, though. It hurts your image. I mean you got this thing going on, right?

(Opposite, ERYNNE enters.)

KIMBERLY

What thing?

NEMO

This um… `I'm better than you' thing. How's that work for you? You make a lot of friends that way? Cause let me tell you what I see when I look at you, okay? Let's see, you spend a lot of time on your hair, cause you think that makes you special. And you really like feeling special all the time cause deep down you're afraid you're not all that smart or interesting or anything, so you better make sure your hair is perfect cause otherwise no one's gonna look at you. And you like to be looked at, don't you? Reminds you that you exist, cause otherwise you just might fade out of existence.

KIMBERLY

Piss off. *<go away.>*

NEMO

Hey that's cool.

(He spots ERYNNE and goes over to her.)

NEMO

What's up?

ERYNNE

What were you doing talking to that girl?

NEMO

What girl?

ERYNNE

That chick from my history class.

NEMO

What's your problem?

ERYNNE

Just what were you doing over there?

NEMO

I can't talk to other girls?

ERYNNE

Well, yeah, but—

NEMO

Whatever.

(CHUBB comes over.)

CHUBB

Hey guys.

ERYNNE

What's going on?

(NEMO gives CHUBB a look.)

CHUBB

Oh. Right. I'll see you later.

ERYNNE

What was that about?

NEMO

Hey can we talk?

ERYNNE

We're talking now.

NEMO

I mean, you know, away from everyone.

ERYNNE

Um… okay.

(NEMO takes ERYNNE outside.)

What's up?

(Pause.)

What's going on? Talk to me, what's wrong?

NEMO

So uh… I've been thinking about this a lot. And… I'll just come out and say this—I think we should break up.

(Pause.)

Because… I don't think you're happy—

ERYNNE

The reason I'm not happy isn't you!

NEMO

Right. But…

ERYNNE

Why do you wanna break up with me?

NEMO

I'm trying to tell you. Okay—I don't think we're happy together… and it seems like all I do is make you miserable and I'm just not… I don't wanna be your therapist any more. Okay?

ERYNNE

Well maybe I could do something and—

NEMO

I don't think so.

ERYNNE

There's gotta be something I can do. I'm sorry, maybe I just talk too much, maybe I won't lay all of that on you any more and we can stay together—

NEMO

We've tried that—

ERYNNE

But I'll really do it this time. And you know, if you need space, I can give you that, and, you know, anything you want, okay?

NEMO

No.

ERYNNE

Ah come on!

NEMO

Erynne—

ERYNNE

You can't just do this! You can't just decide this!

NEMO

Yes I can.

ERYNNE

It's not fair! You didn't even give me a chance to talk about it with you—how long have you been thinking about this?!

NEMO

A couple of days.

ERYNNE

A couple of days that's it?! That's all it takes for you to throw us in the garbage—I'm sorry, throw me in the garbage, and you're in there hitting on another chick already and you haven't even dumped me yet?

NEMO

All right—chill out.

ERYNNE

I hope you rot! I hope you get some kinda horrible disease from that skank—

(ERYNNE tries to move back toward the party.)

NEMO

Where are you going?

ERYNNE

I'm gonna go take that bitch <*chick*> out—

NEMO

She has nothing to do with it!

ERYNNE

Let go of me!

NEMO

Erynne. Chill out. This is not her fault. All right? I've been thinking about this for a while. I don't want to go out with you any more. You're depressed all the time.

ERYNNE

Yeah this'll help with that. Thanks. Thanks for cheering me up.

NEMO

And I don't wanna deal with that any more—

ERYNNE

Well that's nice for you. That you can just shrug me off like a… raincoat or something. I'm sorry I'm depressed, all right? I'm sorry I got kicked out of my house and was living in a car. I'm sorry I can't find a place to sleep. I didn't realize what a burden that was on you. I was too busy trying to stay alive, okay? And I'm really sorry that I tried to lean on you when my whole life was falling apart, and is falling apart, and has fallen completely apart, I'm sorry that I wasn't emotionally strong enough to be able to handle that and just have sex all the time instead of worrying about what I'm going to eat. I realize now that I was a terrible girlfriend and I apologize for not being some brainless bimbo with her own car and a college savings and a rainbow-colored pony burned onto my brain. Sorry. I have other things to think about. So maybe I'll just run off and kill myself so you won't have to deal with "that" any more. Okay? That sound good?

NEMO

Look—

ERYNNE

Don't touch me!

(She storms past him back into the house. CHUBB comes over.)

CHUBB

I'm so sorry, Erynne.

ERYNNE

You knew about this?

CHUBB

He told me earlier.

(ERYNNE kicks at something and pushes past her.)

Hey come on—

(ERYNNE slams a door.)

(Lights shift slightly. NEMO is still outside. TRAVIS enters, talking to the audience.)

TRAVIS

So I just started walking. And I guess somewhere in my mind I figured I wanted to find Kimberly, and maybe that would be enough. And then I thought—I need one good thing. That's what I need today: One Good Thing. Cause there's too much, you know? And when it seems like one thing goes bad, then all of a sudden everything is, and you don't even know how to deal with it. And all I need, really, is one moment, you know, where something goes my way. And then I'll make it.

End of Excerpt.
To purchase this play, visit www.youthplays.com