

The Boy in the Basement

A full-length play

By Alex Rubin

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CAST OF CHARACTERS
(in order of appearance)

NATE RAYMOND, 15, male	A wise guy. He is fast and smart, though he can't see that in himself.
BETTE RAYMOND, 18, female	Old beyond her years, she is holding everything together. She leads with love and patience.
PAUL RAYMOND, 40s, male	Born to be a father. He loves his kids more than anything and wants desperately to do the right thing.
EDDIE AMAYA, 16, male	Timid and cautious, but with a big heart. He listens more than anyone realizes.
OFFICER JESS COLTON, female	An officer in a small town. She's not used to much happening.
SUSAN MILLER, female	Union rep for Paul's fire department. She's has the temperament of a woman that's spent her career and personal life corralling men.

SETTING

A one story three bedroom home with a basement in Duane, CO, a small mountain town. Early April 2005.

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ACT ONE
PROLOGUE

The set is obscured by a curtain.
On it, a video begins to play. It's
from someone's cell phone. BETTE
and PAUL are cooking in the
kitchen. NATE is holding the phone.

NATE

What are you guys cooking? It smells awful.

BETTE

I think you're smelling yourself.

PAUL

You need to take a shower before dinner, bud. You smell.

NATE

Like roses.

PAUL

Like roses rolled in dog shit.

BETTE

Set the table.

NATE

You want me to set the table or take a shower?

BETTE & PAUL

Both!

NATE

How can I do both?

BETTE picks up the sink nozzle and
sprays it at NATE.

NATE

Assault! She's assaulting me!

PAUL

You guys are making a mess of the kitchen!

NATE

Me? I'm the victim!

PAUL tosses NATE a bottle of
Fabreeze.

PAUL

Here, just spray yourself.

BETTE

Dad, ew.

PAUL

And put down the phone.

NATE

I'm documenting.

Nate swings the phone around to
show EDDIE, small and quiet,
leaning on the breakfast bar. EDDIE
smiles shyly.

NATE

What are we doing here, Eddie?

EDDIE

Making dinner.

BETTE

We are making dinner. You two are just goofing off.

EDDIE

I can help.

PAUL

You're fine, Eddie.

NATE flips the camera so it's a
selfie and stands next to EDDIE,
draping his arm around the other
boy.

NATE

Let's all get a family photo.

EDDIE

Here, I'll take it.

PAUL

Bud, you're one of the family.

BETTE

That means we can get rid of Nate, right? I only need one brother.

PAUL

Yeah, I guess that's true.

NATE

This is hurtful talk.

BETTE

Dinner's ready! Set the table!

NATE

Wait, I want to take a picture of us.

NATE sets up the camera so it's on the breakfast bar, showing him and EDDIE.

PAUL

Nate, come on.

NATE

Come over here! Bette! One picture. God!

BETTE and PAUL enter frame and the three surround EDDIE, their arms around him and each other.

NATE

Okay, ready: one, two, three...

Everyone stands frozen and smiling for a moment.

BETTE

(through her smile)

Did it go?

NATE giggles to himself. They all stay frozen for another second...

BETTE
(realizing)

Nate, is it a video?

NATE laughs out loud. BETTE rolls her eyes and PAUL throws his hands up in exasperation. He pushes NATE out of frame.

PAUL

Set the table NOW.

All walk out of frame except for EDDIE who smiles like its his birthday.

The video ends and everything is dark.

Lights up on a police interview room. PAUL sits on one side of the table. His shirt has some kind of sinister stain on it. OFFICER JESS COLTON enters.

OFFICER COLTON

Paul?

He doesn't answer.

OFFICER COLTON
(louder)

Paul?

PAUL
(snapping out of it)

Yeah?

OFFICER COLTON

You want some coffee?

PAUL

No thanks.

OFFICER COLTON

We're going to record you.

PAUL

Okay.

OFFICER COLTON

So that there are no mistakes, no misunderstandings.

PAUL

I understand.

OFFICER COLTON

It's for your protection. So you can get your story out completely.

PAUL

(harshly)

I get it.

OFFICER COLTON leans back.

PAUL

I'm sorry, Jess. Thank you.

OFFICER COLTON

I'm not doing the favor for you. I'm doing it for your kids.

PAUL

Thank you anyway.

OFFICER COLTON

And call me Officer Colton while we're here.

PAUL

Got it.

OFFICER COLTON

You ready?

PAUL nods. OFFICER COLTON hits record.

OFFICER COLTON

Okay, Paul. Tell me how you ended up with a dead teenager in your living room.

The curtain drops revealing...

ACT ONE
SCENE ONE

The basement and the ground floor of a one story house of which we can see the kitchen and living room. The rest of the house exists past the door frames. The foyer and the front door are visible leading off from the living room. The basement is finished with a couch, television, a couple tables, and a small bar stocked with only a few bottles, lots of space between them.

Trees surround the house. It feels like the place is remote and very quiet.

BETTE enters the kitchen from the hallway, grabs some trash bags and opens a door in the kitchen that leads to the basement stairs. She trudges down picking up trash on her way: empty cans, magazines, tissues. She picks up a blue shirt and holds it up then puts it in the trash. She makes it to the bottom of the stairs and gets a look at the basement itself. It is littered with junk food wrappers and pizza boxes. She turns to find some beer cans in the corner.

BETTE

(screaming up the stairs)

Nate! If dad finds out you were drinking down here he's going to kill you.

NATE (O.S.)

What?

BETTE

If dad finds out you were drinking he is going to kill you!

NATE (O.S.)

What??

BETTE

IF DAD FINDS OUT YOU WERE DRINKING HE IS GOING TO KILL YOU!!!

NATE appears at the top of the stairs. He walks down until he is two steps from the bottom and leans down so his face is inches from BETTE's face.

NATE

(yelling in her face)

WHAT??

NATE grins at his own hilarity. BETTE shoves the trash bag into his hands.

BETTE

Clean up. Dad gets home tonight.

NATE

We have to go meet the guys.

BETTE

Are you kidding me? You and the guys wrecked the basement. You have to clean it up.

NATE

Dad never comes down here.

BETTE

If he ever does, I'll get in trouble for letting you guys have beer.

NATE

Then you clean it up.

BETTE

I didn't make the mess.

NATE flops onto the couch.

NATE

But you're the one that's bothered by it.

BETTE

Do you think that today, just today you could help me a little?

EDDIE bounds down the stairs. He has a cut on his lip that is starting to heal and his nose looks recently broken.

EDDIE

I'll help!

EDDIE takes the trash bag from her.

BETTE

Thank you, Eddie.

EDDIE

(beaming)

No problem.

NATE pries himself off of the couch and starts to help. Well... kind of. He more flops random things from one place to another. A pillow is tossed onto the couch haphazardly. A cup is tossed kind of near the garbage can. Meanwhile BETTE and EDDIE are cleaning up in earnest.

BETTE

Nate...

NATE

I'm helping. I'm doing what you asked.

BETTE

Not really.

NATE

Don't judge the way I clean, Bette. We all have our own methods. Mine is just more abstract than your boring literal interpretation.

BETTE picks up a blanket and immediately drops it.

BETTE

Why is that wet?

The boys look at her.

BETTE

Why is that wet???

NATE

I would love to tell you, but I do not know.

BETTE looks at EDDIE who shrugs.

BETTE

Okay, I'm going to get gloves and so much bleach and that is going in the wash.

BETTE bounds upstairs. After she leaves NATE smirks.

EDDIE

Do you know what it is?

NATE

It's just beer.

EDDIE

But you're going to let her freak out over it?

NATE

Nope. I'm also going to wildly speculate as to what else it might be.

(yelling upstairs to BETTE)

You don't think it's piss, do you?

BETTE (O.S.)

Ew. Oh my god.

EDDIE and NATE chuckle.

EDDIE

That's screwed up, man.

NATE

I like to keep her on her toes.

EDDIE

You shouldn't mess with her so much.

NATE

Oh my god. Just because you have a crush/on her doesn't mean-

EDDIE

I don't have a crush/I just think that-

NATE

You absolutely do have a/crush.

EDDIE

I don't I'm just trying to tell you that you're lucky/to have-

NATE

Lucky to get yelled at all the time.

EDDIE

Lucky to have a sister. And one that's nice to you and lets you have friends over. And she loves you a lot. And I think she'd really like it if you said something nice sometime.

This gives NATE pause. He struggles for a second thinking about this.

NATE

She knows I love her.

EDDIE

Probably.

BETTE comes back down with gloves and a plastic bag. NATE reaches for them.

NATE

I got it.

BETTE

Thank you.

NATE puts the gloves on and picks up the blanket.

NATE

It's too much liquid for it to be cum, right?

BETTE

You know what, just throw it out.

NATE smirks at EDDIE.

NATE

I can't help myself.

Upstairs, PAUL enters the house and walks from the living room into the kitchen. He sees something on the counter and rubs at it. His mouth becomes a thin line of frustration. He looks in the living room, then heads back out towards his bedroom.

BETTE

How late did you stay up last night?

NATE

Not too late. Three or four.

BETTE

Oh, sensible.

EDDIE

We just hung out.

BETTE

I can see that.

PAUL comes back into the kitchen and starts looking in the cabinets.

NATE

Have you seen my blue shirt?

BETTE

What does it look like.

NATE

Blue.

BETTE

Did you leave it somewhere?

NATE

On the steps I thought.

BETTE

Well, that's not a good place for it.

BETTE fishes the shirt out of the
trash bag.

NATE

Well, next time I'll leave it on face. Is that a good place
for it?

BETTE shoves the shirt back in the
trash bag.

BETTE

Haven't seen it.

PAUL climbs up on the counter
looking on top of the cabinets.

NATE

We really need to get going, Bette.

BETTE

I didn't know sitting outside 7/11 had such a strict start
time.

EDDIE

It's okay. We have time.

NATE

No, we don't. People are waiting for us.

BETTE

Alright, go then. But don't stay out -

PAUL drops something with a crash.
The kids all freeze.

BETTE

Is one of the boys still upstairs?

NATE and EDDIE shake their heads
no.

BETTE

Stay here.

BETTE creeps up the stairs.

BETTE

Hello?

PAUL

Hey, honey!

BETTE

Dad? DAD!

She looks down at the boys who
immediately go into high gear
cleaning.

BETTE

What are you doing home?

PAUL

I switched with someone. You down in the basement?

BETTE

Yeah, hold on.

BETTE leaps down the stairs and
helps the boys shove trash into
corners, under things, etc.

PAUL

What are you guys up to?

BETTE

Watching TV!

They throw the last of the garbage under a couch cushion and all collapse onto the couch just as PAUL appears at the top of the steps.

PAUL

Anything good?

He looks at the TV which is off.

NATE

... Nope. Nothing.

PAUL

Have you guys seen your grandma's casserole dish?

NATE

I don't know what that is.

PAUL

It's a dish that you make casserole in.

NATE

I have no idea what that would look like.

BETTE

Isn't it in the kitchen?

PAUL

I don't see it there.

BETTE

Are you going to make a casserole?

PAUL

Uh... I was thinking about it.

EDDIE

Casserole sounds great.

PAUL

Hey, Eddie.

EDDIE

Hey, Mr. Raymond.

PAUL
(referring to EDDIE's face)
You get into a fight with brick wall?

EDDIE
Fell off of my skateboard.

PAUL
Careful, bud.

BETTE
Dad, do I need to go to the store to get stuff for a
casserole?

PAUL
Well, I can't make it if I can't find the dish.

NATE
Right. We could also do pizza.

PAUL
Let's not order in. There's some chicken fingers in the
freezer. We'll do that.

BETTE
Sounds great, Daddy.

PAUL
Great, dinner will be ready in...
(realizing the time)
In nine hours. It's 10am.

NATE
Seems like just enough time.

PAUL
Well... who wants breakfast?

NATE
French toast?

PAUL
French toast.

The kids thunder up the stairs and
into the kitchen.

Everyone separates. They clearly have established jobs in the kitchen. PAUL starts slicing bread, NATE gets stuff out of the refrigerator. BETTE finds the griddle, sets it on the stove, and turns the stove on. EDDIE sets the table. BETTE turns on some music as NATE mixes eggs, milk, salt, and cinnamon in a bowl. They start an assembly line. PAUL hands the bread to NATE who dunks it in the mixture and hands it to BETTE who puts it on the grill then hands the finished product to EDDIE who puts it on a plate.

PAUL

I heard a story about a guy that went to the psychiatrist today.

The kids all smile, knowing what's coming.

BETTE

What happened?

PAUL

Well, the doctor shows him these Rorschach ink blots and says to him what do you see. They guys says, I see a man and a woman and they're having sex. The doctor shows him the next one and says, what do you see? He says, there's a man and a woman on the beach and they're having sex. The doctor shows him another and says, what do you see? They guy says, well, it's a man, he's with two women, and they're all having sex. After a while, the doctor says to him, sir, you've got the filthiest mind I've ever seen and the guy says, hey, doc -

The kids join him in unison.

ALL

You're the one showing me all the dirty pictures!

PAUL

(sarcastically)

Oh, have I told you that one?

The kids giggle with delight.

NATE

Dad, how do you make a tissue dance?

PAUL

I don't know, how?

Nate does a little dance as he says:

NATE & BETTE

You put a little boogie in it!

BETTE

A guy goes to see a doctor and he says, doctor, you gotta help me. I've got these things crawling all over me. The doctor says, it's just your imagination. The guys says, but it's all day and night. I can feel them on every inch of my skin. The doctor says, it's just you're imagination. The guy says, but they're in my ears and under my finger nails and crawling up my nose. It's just your imagination! But they're multiplying everyday and I can't - I can't -

BETTE grabs something imaginary from her shoulder and throws it.

BETTE

Get off! The doctor says,

ALL

Never throw one of those things at a doctor!

Everyone laughs then looks at EDDIE.

EDDIE

Knock, knock.

ALL

Who's there?

EDDIE

Boo.

ALL

Boo who?

EDDIE

Don't cry, it's only a joke.

Tepid, pity laughter. The last of the french toast is flipped onto the plate and EDDIE takes it to the table. Everyone sits around and digs in. Suddenly, PAUL looks up.

PAUL

Don't you guys have school?

BETTE

It's Saturday, Dad.

PAUL

Is it?

BETTE

Yeah.

PAUL

The days really blend together after the age of twenty-five.

NATE

So, it's been a rough hundred years.

PAUL

Hundred and twenty, thank you.

PAUL looks around.

PAUL

We should clean the house today.

NATE

Eddie and I are going skating.

PAUL

No, you're not. The forest fire is spreading.

NATE

We'll be fine. We're using Dylan's pool while it's drained. Everyone knows if there's a fire you should be in a pool.

BETTE

Why would that help?

NATE

It's where water lives Bette. How could it not help?

PAUL

The wind shifted this morning, the fire's creeping toward town. You're staying in the house and Eddie, you should go home so you don't get stuck here.

NATE

The fire could just as easily turn away again.

PAUL

Doubtful.

NATE

Why?

PAUL

Because I doubt it.

NATE

Well, can Eddie stay here, then?

PAUL

I wish, pal. I don't want him to be separated from his mom if we have to evacuate.

EDDIE

It's okay. She won't mind.

PAUL

Yes, she would. Finish your breakfast quick or I'll make you take out the trash before you go -

NATE

Done! Eddie and I are going to go play video games.

PAUL

Were you listening? We're cleaning the house today.

NATE

You were serious??

PAUL

Why wouldn't I be serious?

NATE

I feel like you had this joking quality to your voice when you said it.

PAUL

No.

NATE

See, there it is again.

BETTE

Why do we need to clean the house? I feel like I'm keeping it up.

PAUL

It looks great, honey. I'm thinking we should do a little spring cleaning. Maybe put some stuff together for a yard sale.

NATE

What stuff?

PAUL

Stuff we don't use.

NATE

Mom's stuff?

PAUL

Uh... maybe. You know, things that no one needs anymore.

NATE

I don't think you should give away someone else's stuff without their permission.

PAUL

Well if she wanted a say in what happens in this house she'd be here, wouldn't she?

Everyone is quiet.

PAUL

We could do it another day.

BETTE

No, I think it's a good idea. Maybe we can get some money from the yard sale and take a vacation.

PAUL

Maybe.

EDDIE starts to clear the dishes.

PAUL

We'll get those, buddy. You should head home.

EDDIE

I can just help with the clean up first.

PAUL

That's okay. Hurry up before the smoke travels up here. It'll give you a cough.

BETTE

Bye, Eddie.

EDDIE

Bye. See you later.

PAUL

Watch out for that dead tree near the driveway. I think those branches are about to break off and I haven't had a chance to take care of them.

EDDIE heads out the living room and through the front door.

BETTE

Nate, why don't you start with the basement?

NATE

The basement has the most stuff!

BETTE

And you spend the most time in it.

NATE

Dad!

PAUL

It's mostly your old stuff down there.

BETTE

Yeah, last night I saw a bunch of your things lying around. You should take care of that.

BETTE raises her eyebrows at NATE who continues to stand his ground.

PAUL

Just start and we'll join you later.

NATE heads down to the basement. As he hits the last step, EDDIE shimmies through the small windows near the ceiling of the basement.

NATE

This is bullshit.

EDDIE

I'll help.

NATE

Let's play something.

EDDIE

We should at least get rid of the cans. And hide my stuff.

NATE

Fiiiiiiiiine.

In the kitchen, BETTE watches PAUL put dishes in the sink for a moment. She pulls a letter out of her back pocket and holds it behind her back.

BETTE

Hey, Daddy...

PAUL

Did you put a hot pan on the counter?

BETTE

No.

PAUL

It's okay if you did. I'd just rather you tell me.

BETTE

I didn't.

PAUL

The counter is burned here.

BETTE

Maybe Nate did it.

PAUL

Nate cooked?

BETTE

He eats a ton of food. I'm not cooking for him every time he gets hungry.

PAUL

Okay, if you could just tell him to be careful.

BETTE

Sure. Do you have a minute to talk?

PAUL

Yeah, honey.

The phone rings. PAUL looks at the caller ID.

PAUL

I've got to take this. It's work. I'll be a minute.

He rushes out of the kitchen to his room. NATE enters from downstairs. He goes into the pantry.

NATE (O.S)
(from the pantry)

Are there any chips?

BETTE
We just ate breakfast. Why do you need chips?

NATE (O.S)
I'm hungry.

BETTE
Eat an apple.

NATE (O.S.)
Gross.

BETTE
What are you getting into?

NATE (O.S.)
Nothing, just looking.

BETTE puts her head down on the
counter. NATE emerges from the
pantry.

NATE
Okay. I'm going to go out and get chips.

BETTE
No. You heard dad. It's too dangerous.

NATE
I'm just going down the street.

BETTE
No, Nate!

BETTE grabs a box of Chex cereal
and puts it into his hands.

BETTE
Here. Eat this. It's like morning chips.

NATE
Come on, Bette. Dad's just being a pain in the ass.

BETTE

He knows what he's talking about.

NATE

I'll be fifteen minutes tops.

NATE sees a look in her eyes that discourages him from arguing.

He grudgingly takes the Chex and heads downstairs. Lights dim on the kitchen and come up on the basement.

EDDIE

She didn't buy the chip thing?

NATE

No. I'll find a way to sneak out.

EDDIE

Don't. They're right. It's too dangerous.

NATE

They're overreacting. Dad's a fireman. He's always going to be overly cautious and Bette is Bette. She just jumps onto whatever Dad says.

EDDIE

It's not a big deal. We can skate another day.

NATE

It's not that. I have an errand to run.

EDDIE

What kind of errand?

NATE

I just have stuff I need to get done.

EDDIE

You're going to see her?

NATE shrugs.

EDDIE

Why don't you just tell them, man?

NATE

I'm done cleaning.

NATE walks over to a game consol
and picks up some games.

NATE

Double oh seven?

EDDIE

Yeah, put it in.

NATE inserts the game into the
consol and grabs two controllers.
The two start playing.

EDDIE

Bette seems stressed.

NATE

She's always stressed.

EDDIE

She seems particularly stressed.

NATE

She's pissed we didn't clean up. She'll get over it. Are you
one or two?

EDDIE

One.

NATE

Switch controllers with me.

They swap.

NATE

Just because you have a crush -

EDDIE

I don't have a crush!

NATE

No, please. Date her. Maybe if she had a boyfriend she'd stop bossing me around.

EDDIE

I don't want to date her. I just think like her.

NATE

That's weird. You're losing.

EDDIE rejoins the game.

EDDIE

Shit.

The boys play.

NATE

Do you have any weed?

EDDIE

Nope.

NATE

If we're going to be stuck here, I at least want to be high.

NATE is visibly agitated.

Upstairs, PAUL is taking a garbage bag to the trash bins outside.

OFFICER COLTON appears a few feet from him.

OFFICER COLTON

At that point, did you know Eddie was in your house?

PAUL

No. I had sent him home. I watched him walk out the door... But on any other day, I would have caught him. I knew that he snuck into the house all the time.

OFFICER COLTON

And you were okay with that?

PAUL

Usually, yes. I always thought he was a good kid. And I didn't want to kick him out if I didn't have to. Nate was mad enough at me as it was.

OFFICER COLTON

Keep focused on what happened next.

PAUL

Nothing happened.

OFFICER COLTON

Paul -

PAUL

Until that night. Late. Around one A.M.

ACT ONE
SCENE TWO

Later that night. There are now boxes in the living room marked "toss" and "sell." They are piled with things. PAUL is in the kitchen. He has taken everything out of the cabinets. Every appliance, dry good, and utensil is out on the counters and floor. PAUL looks exhausted and worried. He suddenly looks up, smelling something. He sticks his head out the window. Nothing. He walks into the living room. Nothing. He looks at the basement door. He opens the door and walks downstairs. EDDIE, who was sleeping on the couch, wakes up and quickly hides behind some boxes.

PAUL moves around the basement, looking for the source of the smell.

Upstairs, NATE is sneaking through the kitchen window.

PAUL opens a box and pulls out the casserole dish he's been looking for. He opens it and looks like he's been punched in the stomach. EDDIE watches him from the shadows.

NATE is stepping into the kitchen backwards. He doesn't see the kitchen stuff all over the place and steps right in it, sending everything crashing. EDDIE jumps in surprise, knocking over the boxes he's hiding behind.

PAUL whips around.

PAUL

Whoever the fuck you are, get out of my house! I have a gun!

EDDIE

Mr. Raymond, it's me!

PAUL

Eddie?

EDDIE

Yeah.

PAUL

Who's upstairs?

EDDIE

I don't know.

PAUL

Stay here.

EDDIE

Do you really have a gun?

PAUL

No.

PAUL grabs a tennis racket and heads for the stairs.

NATE is working quickly, knowing he could get caught. As PAUL creeps up the stairs, NATE strips his shoes, jacket, and jeans and throws them under the sink. BETTE appears in the door to the kitchen and sees him in this process. She doesn't say anything. NATE is in only his boxers and t-shirt as PAUL hits the top of the stairs.

PAUL

Nate?

NATE

Hey... I got up for a glass of water. I didn't see...

PAUL
You okay?

NATE
Yeah.

PAUL
(seeing BETTE)
You okay, sweetie?

NATE whips around to see BETTE.

BETTE
Fine.

PAUL
Good. Who wants to tell me why Eddie is in the basement?

BETTE looks at NATE. NATE swallows hard. Over the next section NATE and PAUL consistently talk over each other.

NATE
Dad, it wasn't safe for him to go/home.

PAUL
I told you the fire was moving toward town./It was perfectly safe.

NATE
That's not what I'm talking/about.

PAUL
Then why don't you tell me what you're/talking about?

NATE
I'm trying/to.

PAUL
Come one, Nate. Don't yank/me around.

NATE
It's his mom.

PAUL

I know they don't get along, but he's got to/go home.

NATE

Dad, I need you to listen/to me.

PAUL

I am/listening.

NATE

No, you're talking. I need you/to listen.

PAUL

Nate, you can't just deflect and make something you did someone else's fault. You can't go through the world/this way.

NATE

I'm not! Every time I try to tell you something you just think I'm making up some/bullshit excuse.

PAUL

Well that's usually what it is. Your grades are bad because your teachers hate you. You dropped out of hockey because it wasn't fair. You're late getting home because no one/had a watch.

NATE

This isn't like that!

PAUL

I don't really see how -

NATE

DAD! Shut up and let me tell you! PLEASE!

PAUL

Fine.

PAUL folds his arms and leans against the wall.

PAUL

Talk.

NATE has trouble starting.

PAUL

I'm listening.

NATE

Come with me.

He goes downstairs, PAUL and BETTE follow. EDDIE is still behind the fallen boxes, petrified.

NATE

Eddie, come out.

He cautiously makes his way out.

EDDIE

I'm really sorry, Mr. Raymond. I didn't mean to upset you -

NATE

Come here.

EDDIE joins NATE who whispers in his ear. EDDIE shakes his head "no." NATE whispers some more. PAUL looks like he's about to say something, but BETTE puts her hand on his arm, urging him to be patient. Finally, EDDIE nods.

NATE

Bette, can you turn around?

BETTE

Why?

NATE

For just a minute, please?

BETTE turns around. EDDIE removes his shirt. His body is covered in bruises.

PAUL

Is that from skating?

EDDIE shakes his head "no."

PAUL

And your lip and nose? Were those from skating?

EDDIE hesitates, but then shakes his head "no."

PAUL

They're from your mom.

EDDIE hangs his head. BETTE, understanding what's happening, puts her hand over her mouth in horror.

PAUL

How long has this been going on, Eddie?

EDDIE shrugs.

PAUL

You have to tell me or I can't help.

EDDIE

Always.

PAUL

What does that mean?

EDDIE

Just how it is.

PAUL

It's been getting worse though?

EDDIE looks away.

NATE

His mom just freaks out. She's psycho.

EDDIE

She's sad.

NATE

That's not an reason for her to go Mortal Kombat on you.

EDDIE

She just gets upset and if I'm around, I annoy her.

NATE

She gets drunk and she beats the crap out of him.

EDDIE looks mortified.

PAUL

Nate.

PAUL rubs the back of his neck,
thinking.

NATE

Dad, come on...

PAUL

Sleep here tonight.

NATE smiles broadly.

PAUL

In the morning, we'll call Child Services.

BETTE

No!

BETTE turns around. EDDIE quickly
pulls his shirt back on, but not
before BETTE gets a look at him.

PAUL

They need to take him out of that house, Bette.

BETTE

And put him into a home or some foster house where who knows
what will happen.

PAUL

Stop. You're scaring him.

BETTE

I'm trying to scare you.

PAUL

Eddie, sit on the couch. I'm going to get something for you to sleep in. Bette, come with me.

EDDIE sits on the couch looking small.

BETTE and PAUL go into the kitchen.

PAUL

Bette, you need to let me handle this.

BETTE

Dad, the foster care system is horrible. He's going to get passed from one family to the next and it's going to traumatize him even more.

PAUL

What else do you expect me to do? I can't sober his mother up or send her to therapy.

NATE quietly joins them in the kitchen.

NATE

He could move in with us.

PAUL

No he can't.

BETTE

He practically lives here anyway.

PAUL

Sleeping over for half the week is very different from living here.

BETTE

He's like a brother to Nate. You can't throw him into the system.

PAUL

I can't take him in either. I can't afford another kid.

BETTE

You said he was one of the family.

PAUL

I didn't mean...

NATE

He trusts you, Dad. He hasn't told anyone else. If you send him away, he'll never trust people again.

PAUL sighs heavily. He holds his head in one hand.

PAUL

Nate, go get Eddie some pajamas. Let's get some sleep and we'll talk about it in the morning.

NATE

You promise not to call anyone?

PAUL

I won't do anything until we have a long talk as a family. I promise.

NATE goes to his room to get pajamas for EDDIE. BETTE looks around the kitchen.

BETTE

So... what's going on here?

PAUL looks up, remembering the state of the room.

PAUL

I was just getting a jump on the kitchen.

BETTE

Okay, well, I can help you with it tomorrow.

PAUL

Yeah, just having trouble sleeping so I thought... Had the night shift yesterday so I'm awake. But I'll take some melatonin and try to go to bed.

EDDIE

(from the basement)

I'll help tomorrow, too.

PAUL
(with a tired smile)

Thanks, Eddie.

NATE re-enters with pajamas and
heads down the stairs.

PAUL
Put those PJs on and then both of you go to bed. I'm serious.
No games or TV.

NATE
'kay, Dad.

EDDIE
Yessir.

BETTE and PAUL start towards their
rooms.

EDDIE
(from the basement)
Mr. Raymond?

PAUL
Yeah?

EDDIE
Thank you.

PAUL pokes his head down the
stairs.

PAUL
You're safe here, buddy. Okay?

EDDIE
Okay.

PAUL heads to his room. As NATE
comes back upstairs and starts
towards his, BETTE grabs his arm.

NATE
Hey -

BETTE

Shh.

She pulls him into the living room.

NATE

Let go of me!

BETTE

Shut. Up. Where were you?

NATE

I was in the kitchen and then you dragged me in here. Do you not know? You were there for it.

BETTE

Where were you sneaking in from?

NATE

What are you talking about? I think you're sleepwalking. Wake up, Bette! This is all a dream!

BETTE

Stop playing around. I didn't tell on you, but I want to know what you were doing.

NATE

Hey, Bette. You're not my fucking mom.

That hits her hard.

NATE

So mind your own business.

NATE heads to his room. After a beat, BETTE follows.

PAUL leans into the kitchen to turn off the lights. The smell hits him again. He looks at the basement door, shakes his head and goes to bed. Smoke subtly starts to rise from the basement.

ACT ONE
SCENE THREE

The next morning. All is calm in the house. PAUL enters the front door, kicking dirt off of his boots.

PAUL

Bette? Nate? Eddie? I got doughnuts. Hello?

No answer.

PAUL

Come on, it's almost noon! Time to get out of bed! Hello??

PAUL opens the door to the basement and stands in the hall so he can be heard all over the house. He bellows like a drill sergeant.

PAUL

EVERYBODY GET UP UP UP UP UP UP UP UP UP UP...

He continues until all three kids appear, looking surly and sleepy.

PAUL

Good morning!

BETTE

Why do you do that?

PAUL

I wouldn't have to if you just came the first time I called.

NATE

We're not dogs, Dad.

PAUL

Yeah, dogs actually learn commands.

NATE

Did you get a sour cream doughnut?

BETTE
That's so gross.

NATE
You're so gross.

BETTE
Your breath is gross.

NATE
Are you sure?

NATE leans into BETTE's face and
exhales heavily.

BETTE
Stop it!

NATE
You have to get close to check.

EDDIE is giggling in the corner.

BETTE
Don't laugh, Eddie. It encourages him.

NATE
He's being a good friend. Good friends encourage each other.

PAUL
Bette and Eddie, take the first showers. We've got cleaning
to do. Nate, make some coffee.

BETTE and EDDIE take their
doughnuts and head for the shower.

NATE
Is it okay if I run out for a few minutes today? I have to
grab a textbook from Kaylie.

PAUL
You forgot it at school?

NATE
Yeah, but she's got one.

PAUL

Did you forget your report card, too?

NATE

It's not out yet.

PAUL

I just saw Kaylie's dad at gas station. She got hers over a week ago.

NATE

Some of them come out earlier.

PAUL

Really?

NATE

Yeah, it's a new system. They're going alphabetically -

PAUL

Why are you lying to me, buddy?

NATE

I'm not -

PAUL

Hey, Nate. Yesterday you lied to me about Eddie going home. I think I was pretty cool about that. But if you keep it up, we're going to have a big problem.

NATE hangs his head.

PAUL

Go get your report card.

NATE slinks out of the room. PAUL leans on the counter waiting for him to come back. When he does, he hands PAUL the report card. PAUL looks it over.

PAUL

We had a deal at the beginning of the marking period.

NATE

I know.

PAUL

You were going to get your grades up or no more skating.

NATE

I know, Dad. It's just that this marking period was really hard.

PAUL

Go get your board.

NATE

No, dad. I can't just stop -

PAUL

If you can't balance school work and skating then you can't skate.

NATE

What am supposed to do with my friends?

PAUL

You'll figure it out.

NATE

It's not fair!

PAUL

Lying to me wasn't fair. Breaking our deal wasn't fair.

NATE

I said I was sorry.

PAUL

That doesn't change that it happened.

NATE

God, can't you take the stick out of your ass just once?

PAUL stares at NATE. NATE knows he's gone too far. PAUL walks out of the room and down the hall. NATE is paralyzed with fear, wondering what is going to happen. PAUL returns with NATE's skateboard.

NATE

Dad... Dad what are you doing?

PAUL goes into the living room and
throws the skateboard into the
"sell" box.

NATE

You can't sell my board!

PAUL

I bought it. I can sell it. Go get dressed.

NATE

No! I said no!

PAUL

Too bad. Go -

NATE reaches for the skateboard.
PAUL grabs it and breaks it over
his knee. NATE stares in complete
shock. PAUL throws it into the
trash box.

PAUL

Go get dressed.

NATE's eyes are brimming with angry
tears. He runs out of the room.

NATE

Fuck you!!!

BETTE runs in, her hair in a towel.

BETTE

What's going on?

She sees the broken board.

BETTE

Dad... you didn't do that.

PAUL

Come on. We've got work to do.

BETTE

You said you were going to watch your temper.

PAUL

I did watch it. I have my limits.

BETTE

You promised.

PAUL looks up and sees smoke coming
from the hall.

PAUL

What the hell -

He runs for the hall.

BETTE

What? Dad, what??

BETTE follows him as he runs
through the house looking for the
source of the smoke.

PAUL

Where is the smoke coming from?

BETTE

What smoke?

PAUL

The smoke! The smoke!

He swings the basement door open,
heat hits his face.

PAUL

Fire...

BETTE

You mean the steam?

PAUL doesn't answer.

BETTE

Dad! It's steam! DAD!

Paul breaks his trance. The heat
from the basement disappears.

PAUL

What?

BETTE

The steam from the bathroom, Dad.

PAUL

Is that... sorry... yeah.

BETTE

Go lie down. We'll start cleaning.

PAUL

Sure. Thanks, honey.

PAUL wanders down the hall to his
room, he takes one more look at the
basement door.

PAUL

Start up here, okay?

ACT ONE
SCENE FOUR

A few hours later, the boxes have been joined by other boxes and bags. The kids sit in the kitchen eating pizza.

BETTE

Garden State is a beautiful movie, Nate.

NATE

It is trash.

BETTE

It's about someone that has been cut off from life reconnecting.

NATE

I'm actually especially shocked that you like this movie.

BETTE

Okay, calm down -

NATE

And I'll tell you why. It's about some whiney guy who is so self-centered that even though everyone else has bigger problems than him, he thinks his are the most important.

BETTE

And you think I should especially not like this movie because?

NATE

You're always talking about how self-centered I am.

BETTE

But that's not what the movie is about.

NATE

Yes, it is!

EDDIE

What movie is this?

NATE and BETTE look at EDDIE in shock. Then, simultaneously:

<p>BETTE</p> <p>You don't know Garden State? It's like the movie for our generation! Zach Braff is just like so real. And Natalie Portman is like quirky and funny...</p>	<p>NATE</p> <p>Eddie, are you living under a rock? It's literally all anyone talks about. I've made jokes about it that you've laughed at. Did you not get the joke...</p>
---	--

PAUL enters.

PAUL

Stop fighting.

He sees the pizza.

PAUL

Who ordered this?

BETTE

I did. Everyone was tired from cleaning. We got through the living room and kitchen -

PAUL

I said yesterday that I didn't want to waste money on pizza.

BETTE

There was a coupon. It was only twelve bucks.

PAUL

And if we don't have electricity next month because we're "only twelve bucks" short, how are you going to fix that?

BETTE

Why would we be short?

PAUL

We just... you'll be going to school in a few months and we don't need to be wasting money now.

NATE

She's just going to State. It's not even half hour away.

PAUL

That doesn't mean it's free.

PAUL sits down and takes a slice of
pizza.

PAUL

Sorry, I'm just tired.

BETTE

You slept all day.

PAUL

Not very well.

Everyone looks at their plates.
EDDIE looks at everyone.

EDDIE

My grandpa used to call me Eddie the Grouch when I was tired.

Everyone looks at him.

BETTE

I didn't know you had a grandpa.

NATE

You thought his parents just emerged from the woods one day?

BETTE

I mean you've never talked about him.

EDDIE

I lived with my grandpa from age three to eleven.

PAUL

Is he still around?

EDDIE

My mom put him in a home because his mind started to go. She
said he died. I don't know if it's true.

PAUL

We could try to find out.

EDDIE

No, thanks. I think if he were alive I wouldn't want to see him now. I don't think it would really be him.

PAUL

But it would be family. He could take care of you.

NATE

Not if he's in a home.

PAUL

Right... right.

Everyone focuses on their pizza again.

PAUL

When I was fifteen, my dad had a stroke.

BETTE and NATE look at PAUL. This is a touchy subject.

EDDIE

Did he die?

PAUL

No. But he wasn't really my dad after that. There was a lot of brain damage. I used to pretend that my dad was on a long trip and there was a friend staying with us while he was gone.

Everyone is quiet.

PAUL

I learned all my best jokes from him.

NATE

How come we've never heard them?

PAUL and NATE lock eyes for a moment, the tension from earlier in the day still lingers. Then PAUL smiles a little.

PAUL

I guess you haven't been listening. Have I told you guys about the three men that were stranded on a desert island? They were wandering around one day when they found a genie in a lamp. The genie offered them each a wish. The first guy wished to be home with his family on the farm. Poof! He disappears back home. The second guy wished to be back in the arms of his love. Poof! He disappears back to his love. The third guy gets lonely and wishes both of them back.

The kids laugh.

BETTE

What would everyone wish for if they had one wish?

NATE opens his mouth.

BETTE

You can't ask for more wishes.

EDDIE

I'd wish for a corporate sponsorship so I could skateboard all day, everyday.

NATE

Me, too, but I want it for video games.

BETTE

I'd wish to invent something that made me a crazy amount of money so I could just travel the world. Dad?

PAUL

I feel like it'd take more than one wish to get Nate's head out of his ass.

The kids howl with laughter. The phone rings. PAUL sees the caller ID.

PAUL

Gotta take this. Clean up, okay?

BETTE

Do you want us to save you the last slice?

PAUL

The boys can have it.

The boys descend on the last slice of pizza, pushing each other's faces away. BETTE watches the grotesque display.

BETTE

That's really cute.

BETTE pulls the trash can out from under the sink and a bottle of vodka spins out. She picks it up.

BETTE

Is this from the party the other night?

NATE

No. We were just drinking beer.

BETTE

Where the hell did this come from?

NATE

Dad?

BETTE

He shouldn't drink. He could always get called into work.

EDDIE

He's had a rough year.

BETTE

It'll be rougher if he shows up to a call drunk and gets suspended. Should I talk to him about it?

NATE

What are you going to do, stage an intervention?

BETTE

No, I'd ask him -

EDDIE

He's your dad, Bette. He's fine.

BETTE

I just don't want it to get out of hand.

EDDIE

Have you even noticed it?

BETTE

No, I guess not.

EDDIE

Then it's probably nothing. Maybe he drank it over time. Maybe he found it somewhere while he was cleaning and was going to recycle it.

BETTE

There's still a little bit left.

NATE

Maybe he's starting a bottle collection and once he gets enough of them, he'll make a chandelier.

BETTE

I'm starting to think you two are drunk.

NATE

No, I'm way more charming when I'm drunk.

EDDIE

Here, give me the trash. I'll take it out.

BETTE hands him the garbage bag.

EDDIE

And I'll put that in the recycling.

BETTE hands EDDIE the bottle. He walks goes to the living room and puts on his coat.

PAUL comes back into the kitchen.

PAUL

I've got to go out for a little while.

BETTE

Did you get called into the station?

PAUL

Just for a minute. You should all be in bed in the next hour. The boys have school tomorrow. Where's Eddie?

BETTE

Taking out the trash. Be careful, the fire -

PAUL

I know.

PAUL kisses BETTE and NATE on the head.

PAUL

I'll be back soon. Stay safe.

He looks at the basement door.

PAUL

And let's have Eddie sleep in Nate's room tonight. I still feel like there's a smell coming from the basement.

BETTE

A bad smell?

PAUL

Yeah.

BETTE

That's just teenage boys. They reek, Dad.

PAUL

Well, then let's give the basement time to air out.

PAUL goes into the living room and pulls his jacket on. BETTE follows.

BETTE

It's been a crazy year.

PAUL

Tell me about it.

BETTE

Do you ever think, "Geeze, what could possibly happen next?"

BETTE slides a letter out of her pocket.

PAUL

I try not to.

BETTE

It could be something good.

PAUL smiles at BETTE who tries to smile back.

PAUL

Bette, I want to thank you.

BETTE

For what?

PAUL

You deferred college for a year. You put your life on hold to take care of this family. Things were crazy, but they could have been a lot worse and I want you to know how much I appreciate you.

BETTE

Thank you. I'm glad I could help. I think it was worth it.

She starts to unfold the letter.

PAUL

And I'm so happy you'll still be in the house when you start school.

BETTE pauses.

PAUL

You're my best friend, honey. Having you so close... It's the greatest gift I could ask for.

PAUL gives BETTE a hug. She hugs him back, first out of response and then tightly.

BETTE

You're my best friend, too.

They release.

PAUL

Get to bed, okay?

BETTE

Okay.

BETTE slides the letter back into her pocket.

PAUL looks for his keys.

Lights come up outside by the trash cans where we can see EDDIE hungrily drinking the last of the vodka.

PAUL opens the door and EDDIE quickly throws the bottle into recycling can. He lifts the trash bag into the trash can.

PAUL

Thanks, bud!

EDDIE

No problem.

PAUL

Watch out for that dead tree. I don't want a branch falling on your head.

PAUL heads to the car. The sound of the car starting and rolling out.

PAUL (O.S.)

Get inside, okay?

EDDIE

Okay!

EDDIE starts for the door. As he sees the car head down the street and turn, he goes back to the recycling can and pulls out the vodka. He tries to get the last drops into his mouth.

ACT ONE
SCENE FIVE

In a special downstage, SUSAN
MILLER waits. PAUL runs in.

PAUL

Hey, Susan!

SUSAN

Hey, Paul. Look at you, you need a warmer coat.

PAUL

I'm fine. How did it go?

SUSAN shifts uncomfortably.

PAUL

You're kidding me.

SUSAN

They want you to know that they appreciate all your years on
the crew.

PAUL

Sue, you can't do this to me. You can't.

SUSAN

I tried, Paul. I went to bat for you hard.

PAUL

They really want to keep one of the old guys that could keel
over at any minute over me?

SUSAN

That's not what it's about. You've barely been at the station
all year.

PAUL

Susan, my wife left me. I'm trying to raise two kids. It
looks like I've got a third on my plate now -

SUSAN

This isn't a job that you can call out from. People die that
way. You want to wait until the reason you're on the chopping
block is someone's death? You want to lose your job that way?

PAUL

Kennedy showed up drunk to a call. Martens is screwing the chief's 19-year-old daughter. I'm just trying to keep my family together.

SUSAN

Don't waste your time thinking about other people -

PAUL

You're my union! You're supposed to protect me from this shit. What do I pay dues for?

SUSAN

Well, that being said, I know it's going to be tight while you look for a new job so we can offer you some relief funds.

PAUL

How much?

SUSAN

Fifteen hundred to get you over the hump.

PAUL

Fifteen hundred? Bette's starting school in the fall. Nate needs braces. Fifteen hundred does nothing for me.

SUSAN

It's to tide you over until you find a new job.

PAUL

In this tiny mountain town? The want ads aren't exactly thick.

SUSAN

I know it's difficult -

PAUL

Oh, yeah, I'm sure you can relate. What other job have you had in your life?

SUSAN

This isn't about me.

PAUL

Well it sure as hell isn't about me! Or my kids! I'm a single goddamn parent, Susan. I can't make this work without a good job.

SUSAN

Again, I'm sorry, Paul. I've got to get back home.

PAUL

(losing his cool)

I'm two years from my fucking pension!

SUSAN backs away from PAUL.

PAUL

I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Please, Susan... eighteen years on the job. Seventeen of them spotless against one bad year.

SUSAN tightens her lips.

SUSAN

I can probably swing another five hundred in relief. But that's all I can do, Paul. Get home. The wind could send smoke from the fire over the road any minute. Your kids can't afford to lose you.

PAUL

Thanks for the fucking advice. Tell all the other Juduses I said bye.

SUSAN

I really do wish you the best, Paul. I know it doesn't seem like we care, but we do.

PAUL

(acidly)

Oh, I really appreciate your good wishes.

SUSAN exits. OFFICER COLTON appears.

OFFICER COLTON

Where are we now?

The sound of fire crackling.

PAUL

The last night.

PAUL exits, running for home.

ACT ONE
SCENE SIX

PAUL comes back into the house and locks the front door. He throws his coat down in frustration, grabs a pillow from the couch, and buries his face in it. He screams into the pillow then throws it down and drops onto the couch.

After a moment, he can hear the crackling of a fire. He darts up and yanks the front door open. He looks around. Has the forest fire turned in their direction?

Nothing outside.

He walks back into the house and follows the sound. It's coming from the basement.

PAUL rushes down the stairs and starts searching for the source of the sound and smell. He rips through boxes.

Bette wanders sleepily into the kitchen.

BETTE

Dad?

She follows the sound of boxes being thrown around, padding halfway down the basement steps.

BETTE

Dad, what are you doing?

PAUL

It's something in the basement.

BETTE

What is?

PAUL

Something burning. I can smell it.

BETTE

I don't smell anything.

PAUL

I can hear it! There is something burning. The whole house will go up.

BETTE

Dad, you're tired. You have to get some sleep.

PAUL

If I go to sleep we'll all burn to death.

BETTE

There's nothing burning.

NATE comes downstairs.

NATE

I'm a growing boy. I need my sleep.

He sees PAUL frantically pulling the basement apart.

NATE

What the hell is Dad doing?

BETTE

I think we need to call someone.

NATE

Who?

BETTE

Call, the guys at the station.

PAUL

Do NOT call the station.

BETTE

I just want to see if someone can come look with you.

PAUL

I'm not talking to those assholes.

BETTE

Did you have a fight?

PAUL

They fired me, Bette. Is that what you want to hear?

BETTE

No... that's not what I want to hear. Did they really fire you?

PAUL

Why the hell else would I be home?

BETTE

What happened?

PAUL

You know, budget gets cut, so the newest guy goes.

BETTE

You've worked there for eighteen years.

PAUL

I was the last hired. The guy before me just had his 25th anniversary in the department.

BETTE

Alright... so, we'll figure it out, but running around the basement tearing things apart isn't going to help.

NATE

You look insane, Dad.

PAUL

Hey! I know what I'm talking about. This is my job. And if I say that I smell a fire in the house, there is a fire in the house.

EDDIE runs down the stairs.

EDDIE

What's going on?

At the bottom of the stairs, EDDIE rests his hand on a box next to the stairs. It erupts into flames. Everyone staggers back.

PAUL stares at EDDIE with wild eyes.

PAUL

It's you.

END OF ACT ONE.

ACT TWO
SCENE ONE

In the interview room. OFFICER COLTON sets a coffee mug in front of PAUL. He is still in the stained shirt.

OFFICER COLTON

So, the kid set fire to a box.

PAUL

No. That's not what happened. It wasn't that he lit a match or anything. It was that he was the fire. He touched it and... his touch set it on fire.

OFFICER COLTON

Paul... I've known you for years, right?

PAUL

Right.

OFFICER COLTON

I'm trying to help you.

PAUL

Okay, sure. I've seen enough cop shows. I know what's happening. You don't have to trick me.

OFFICER COLTON

That's not what's going on.

PAUL

I'm telling you what happened. If you don't believe me, it's... well, then you don't believe me. But I'm telling you there were no matches. There was no electrical spark. The thing just erupted into flames.

OFFICER COLTON

Okay. Let's say the box... spontaneously combusted.

PAUL

That's not real.

OFFICER COLTON

But setting something on fire by touching it is?

PAUL has no response for her.

OFFICER COLTON

Then what?

PAUL

The box kind of... put itself out.

OFFICER COLTON

Well, that's nice of it.

PAUL

I don't know. It just went out. So, I sent the kids back to bed. But I couldn't sleep.

PAUL picks up the coffee mug and wanders back into the house and into the kitchen. As he walks:

PAUL

The smell came in and out like a slow pulse. It pressed on me. And I could hear it somehow.

A strange kind of pulse sound starts. Without PAUL noticing, time is passing.

PAUL

It pressed on my nose, ears, eyes. I could taste the smoke.

OFFICER COLTON

Smoke coming up from the forest fire?

PAUL

No. I know what that smells like. This was something hotter.

BETTE enters kitchen.

BETTE

Dad?

Startled, PAUL spills his coffee on himself.

PAUL

Damnit.

BETTE

Sorry! Did you burn yourself?

PAUL

No, the coffee's cold.

PAUL is surprised to see it's morning. He looks at his shirt which now seems to have just a coffee stain.

BETTE

Did you sleep?

PAUL

No.

BETTE

Me neither.

BETTE puts on a fresh pot of coffee.

BETTE

Do you want to talk?

PAUL

Let's wait until the boys go to school.

BETTE sits at the table with PAUL.

BETTE

They won't be up for at least a half hour. Tell me what happened.

PAUL

Something's wrong, Bette. Something with Eddie.

BETTE

I mean with your job.

PAUL

It was him.

BETTE

Dad...

PAUL

That was a box of your mother's stuff.

BETTE

So?

PAUL

And this.

PAUL pulls out a blackened
casserole dish.

BETTE

A casserole dish?

PAUL

This is the dish I was looking for.

BETTE

Okay...

PAUL

When your mom left, I took a bunch of money out of our joint account so that she couldn't get to it and I put it in this casserole dish which I then put in the back of the kitchen cabinet.

BETTE

How much money?

PAUL

Five thousand dollars.

BETTE looks like the wind has been
knocked out of her.

BETTE

You think Eddie stole it?

PAUL

I don't know. All I know is that it was in a box, where I did not put it, and when I was digging around the basement last night, that box all of a sudden caught fire. What do you think about that?

BETTE

I think... that you haven't really slept. And that you have a lot of stress on you. Maybe you should lie down for awhile.

BETTE gets up to pour the finished coffee.

PAUL

I didn't take a day off from work when your mom and I were having problems.

BETTE freezes. She doesn't want to hear this.

PAUL

I mean... I still tried. I went to therapy with her. I picked her up from bars. I picked her up from a motel once. The guy that she went with left her there. I went and picked her up from cheating on me. Can you imagine that? And I made sure you and Nate didn't see her when she was like that. Hungover and stinking with someone else's cologne. You didn't know, did you?

BETTE

No, Daddy.

PAUL

And through all of that, I still made it to every shift. But when she finally left... it was too much. You guys needed me. I needed a rest. I don't know. It all slipped away from me.

BETTE

I didn't know that was going on. But I could feel that something wasn't right.

PAUL

Yeah. I guess that was hard to hide.

BETTE

I still feel like things aren't right.

PAUL

That's what I'm saying. There's something with Eddie. Think about it, he's the only thing in the house that's different -

BETTE

No, he's not. Everything is different. Mom left and nothing is the same. Maybe it just seems like Eddie is the reason because he's not your kid. It's easier to think that someone that isn't your blood is the problem. It's easier to think that someone other than you is the problem...

PAUL

I appreciate that you are trying to help, Bette, but you're off here.

BETTE

I'm at home a lot more than you are.

PAUL

Yeah, but you're a kid.

BETTE

A kid? I take care of Nate, clean the house, cook. I'm the only adult in the house most of the time.

PAUL

What kind of adult lets teenagers drink down in the basement?

BETTE closes her mouth in shock and fear.

PAUL

I guess you all think I'm a real moron. I can smell the alcohol and air freshener. I tried to have a drink from my own vodka and it's just water.

BETTE

I thought they were drinking beer.

PAUL

That would make it better?

BETTE

They're going to do it anyway. At least here I can watch them.

PAUL

Do you know how much trouble I could get into? I could go to jail for having underage kids drinking in my house.

BETTE

You aren't there when it happens.

PAUL

It's still my house.

(laughs in disbelief)

I don't know why I'm arguing with you about not doing something illegal.

BETTE

I didn't think -

PAUL

I don't care, Bette. Just cut it out.

BETTE

I'm sorry.

BETTE looks devastated. PAUL can't handle that.

A thundering is heard in the hallway as the boys run to the living room. They're both in t-shirts and boxers.

PAUL

Hey! You two have to get ready!

NATE

Hold on!

They switch on the television and turn to the news. They watch the scrolling school closures at the bottom. PAUL and BETTE join them, standing behind the boys. Finally...

NATE and EDDIE whoop with excitement.

NATE
No school!

BETTE
Why?

PAUL
Because of the forest fire. It must be spreading.

BETTE
Should we be leaving?

PAUL
No evacuations yet.
The boys are dancing around the room.

PAUL
Hey, guys?
They look up.

PAUL
You want to put some pants on?
EDDIE, realizing he is without pants in front of BETTE, is instantly mortified.

EDDIE
Oh my god.
EDDIE runs out. NATE shrugs.

NATE
I'm good.
NATE heads into the kitchen followed by PAUL and BETTE. NATE reaches for the coffee.

PAUL
None of that for you, bud.

NATE

I've had it before.

PAUL

It'll stunt your growth.

NATE

Great. People will think I'm a kid my whole life. I'll get half priced movie tickets and eat at buffets for free.

PAUL looks at BETTE who is still hurt by their earlier conversation. She sits at the table, staring at her hands. He sits down next to her.

PAUL

I'm sorry.

BETTE

It's okay.

PAUL

It's not. But thank you for saying it is. I get upset. And I ended up breaking a promise to you not to lose my temper. We made a deal and I broke it. I'm sorry.

NATE

Do we have Sweet'n'Low?

PAUL

Put down the coffee, Juan Valdez.

NATE

I don't get that joke.

PAUL

Come here.

NATE comes over. PAUL looks intensely at his kids.

PAUL

I love you both so much.

BETTE

Love you, Daddy.

NATE

It's so early for this.

PAUL

I know that we're all doing our best in a bad situation. I'm sorry for when I lose my patience. And I forgive you guys when you lose yours. It's going to be a rough few months. But we'll be okay. Got it?

BETTE and NATE nod. PAUL pulls them into a big hug.

PAUL

You two are the best thing in my life. I'm not going to let anything happen to you.

EDDIE appears in the doorway to the kitchen. PAUL looks up, smelling something. He looks at EDDIE. They're both searching for some kind of understanding. Finally...

PAUL

Come here, Eddie.

BETTE and NATE open their arms to bring EDDIE into the circle. They all hug for a moment.

PAUL

Okay. Breakfast and then we finish cleaning the house.

NATE

Seriously?? We worked all weekend, school gets cancelled, and we still have to work??

PAUL

If you had worked a little harder yesterday, we would be done and you could play video games all day. But since you puttered around...

NATE

Don't I have any rights?

PAUL

Not until you're 18.

BETTE

And even then...

PAUL

Eighteen and out of the house. So it looks like no one gets their rights anytime soon.

PAUL ruffles everyone's hair.

BETTE

I'm going to get dressed.

NATE

I've got to make a call.

PAUL

To who?

NATE

Kaylie. I have a question about an assignment.

PAUL

Call after breakfast. I need your help.

EDDIE

I can help.

PAUL nods and NATE leaves. EDDIE and PAUL are alone. They begin making breakfast. EDDIE takes eggs and bacon out of the refrigerator.

PAUL

How's school going, Eddie?

EDDIE

Fine.

PAUL

You doing okay in class?

EDDIE

Yeah.

They continue making breakfast for a moment. EDDIE takes his report card out of his back pocket. He stares at it.

EDDIE

Do you want to see?

PAUL looks surprised, but nods.

PAUL

Sure, bud.

EDDIE hands the report card over and PAUL studies it.

EDDIE

It's... uh... it's my first time getting all B's.

PAUL

That's really great.

EDDIE

Thanks. It's because of Bette. She helps me with my homework.

PAUL

I didn't know that.

EDDIE

And... I get more sleep when I stay here so I'm not falling asleep in class so much.

PAUL

Why are you telling me this?

EDDIE

Because I know that Bette and Nate are probably in trouble for hiding me here. And I know that you're probably mad at me, too, for lying. But... the past three months have been the best months of my life.

PAUL

Three months?

EDDIE

Yeah.

PAUL

I guess I really have been distracted.

EDDIE

I'm sorry we lied.

PAUL

(sighs)

It's okay. I understand why. And... I'm really proud of you.

EDDIE beams at the parental praise.

PAUL

Is there anything else you want to tell me?

EDDIE licks his lips.

EDDIE

I get a certificate.

PAUL

That's great, buddy. Is there something else?

EDDIE nervously takes a step back from PAUL. BETTE and NATE enter the kitchen.

BETTE

You guys are up. We'll finish breakfast.

NATE looks at the uncooked eggs and bacon.

NATE

Or start it, I guess.

NATE hands EDDIE some clean clothes to wear. PAUL goes to his room and EDDIE to the basement to get dressed. As PAUL leaves, BETTE leans over and pinches NATE.

NATE

OW!

BETTE

You got me in trouble, you dick.

NATE

What did I do?

BETTE

Dad knows you guys have been drinking in the basement.

NATE

You let us.

BETTE

And apparently his bottle of vodka is all water.

NATE

I didn't know.

BETTE

They're your friends. You should have been watching them.

Downstairs, EDDIE is searching for something. He finally comes up with it: a small bottle of vodka. He takes a deep drink from it then takes out a bottle of mouth wash and swishes it around his mouth. He stands on a table to reach the window and spits outside. The drink has scratched an itch.

NATE

Well, technically, you shouldn't have let me have them over in the first place.

BETTE

Fine. They can't come over anymore.

NATE

Yeah, we'll see.

BETTE

Why don't you want to help me?

NATE

You're being so annoying.

BETTE

I'm serious. Nate, I waited a year to go to college so I could be here for you and Dad.

NATE

You basically hang around the house all day. That's not really a sacrifice.

BETTE

Yes it is.

NATE

How?

BETTE

I'm doing mom's job.

NATE

Oh fuck off.

BETTE

I'm taking care of you and the house -

NATE

I take care of myself.

BETTE

I do your laundry and drive you around.

NATE

Then don't. Who asked you to?

BETTE

And I'm the only person Dad talks to.

NATE

He talks to me, too, genius.

BETTE

Not about the bad stuff. Not about mom.

NATE

I don't really care about what he has to say about mom.

BETTE

I don't want to hear it either.

NATE

Tell him to stop.

BETTE

Who else is he going to talk to? Nate, you can't imagine the kind of shit she put him through -

NATE

I said that I don't want to know. It's his version of it anyway, right?

BETTE

What does that mean?

NATE

I mean that there are two sides to every story. Maybe his is designed to make him look like a hero.

BETTE

I think when I put them up next to each other, he is the closest thing to a hero in this story.

NATE

From his point of view.

BETTE stares hard at NATE.

BETTE

Have you talked to mom?

NATE

Couple times.

BETTE

Where is she?

NATE

Doesn't matter.

NATE walks away from the stove, leaving the bacon cooking. EDDIE climbs the steps, checking his breath.

BETTE

What is she telling you?

NATE

We just talk.

BETTE

Is she coming back?

EDDIE walks into the kitchen.

NATE

Keep your nose out of it.

EDDIE

The bacon's burning.

EDDIE rushes to the frying pan.

BETTE

Look, fine. You don't have to tell me. But you can't keep sneaking out to see her.

NATE

I'm not.

BETTE

So the other night you had just stepped out of the kitchen window for some air?

NATE

Yeah, I did.

BETTE

Just stop being an asshole and tell me something for real. Just once.

NATE squares off to BETTE.

NATE

I'm going to live with mom.

BETTE is stunned.

NATE

So you can stop playing the martyr card and dad can stop being pissed that he has an idiot for son, because I'll be gone.

When?
BETTE

Soon.
NATE

You can't go...
BETTE

Not up to you.
NATE

BETTE
I know it's hard, Nate. I know. But I'm trying. I'm really trying. What do you want me to do?

PAUL enters the kitchen.

NATE
I don't want you to do anything. I just want Mom.

The pan in EDDIE's hand erupts into flames. He drops it and the grease spills onto the counter, lighting it. BETTE and NATE stagger back. EDDIE jumps into action. He grabs the hose from the sink and aims it at the fire.

PAUL
Eddie, no!

The water hits the grease fire, splattering it against the wall. BETTE finally grabs the fire extinguisher from under the sink and sprays the counter.

EDDIE
I'm sorry! I'm sorry! I didn't mean to!

BETTE
It's okay, you didn't know -

PAUL
How did you do it?

EDDIE

I just thought the water would put it out!

PAUL leans down to get eye to eye
with EDDIE, calmly he asks:

PAUL

How are you starting these fires?

The OFFICER COLTON appears.

OFFICER COLTON

Paul, that sounds crazy.

PAUL says in the scene, not
breaking eye contact with EDDIE.

PAUL

Yeah, you aren't the first person to say it.

BETTE

Dad, you sound crazy.

EDDIE

I didn't - I was just - the bacon was burning -

BETTE

Nate left the pan on the stove!

NATE

I didn't do anything to it, though! It just caught fire! I
didn't do anything wrong!

BETTE

I didn't say you did. I'm saying nobody did anything. It was
a random fire.

PAUL

And last night?

BETTE

Coincidence. Dad.

PAUL looks up at her.

BETTE

Let go of Eddie.

PAUL lets go of EDDIE.

PAUL

Sorry, just want to make sure you're alright. Is everyone alright?

Everyone nods.

PAUL

I'm going to go out and get doughnuts. Okay?

BETTE

The forest fire...

PAUL

I'll be careful.

PAUL leaves the kitchen and puts his coat on in the living room.
EDDIE follows him.

EDDIE

Mr. Raymond...

PAUL

Yeah... What's up, buddy?

EDDIE

You think the fires are my fault?

PAUL

No... no, I think Bette's right. I'm just tired.

EDDIE

I think they are, too.

PAUL

Why do you say that?

EDDIE

My mom says I'm like a disease. I infect everything I touch. I think you should take me home. I think I might be infecting this family.

PAUL is heartbroken.

PAUL

What did I say last night when I told you that you could stay? I said you're safe here. That means safe from your mom and every poisonous thing she's said to you. Bette's right. This is just some crazy coincidence. And we're all okay, right?

EDDIE

Right.

PAUL

So, don't worry about it.

PAUL touches EDDIE's arm. They both jump like they've been bitten.

EDDIE

Static shock.

PAUL

Yeah, I guess because the air is so dry. I'll be back in a bit.

PAUL exits, staring at his hand.

He looks at OFFICER COLTON.

PAUL

It wasn't a shock, Jess. It was a burn. He burned me.

In the house, EDDIE is examining his arm where PAUL touched him. He too feels like it was more than a shock.

In the kitchen, BETTE is trying to clean up. NATE sits at the table.

BETTE

Will you please help me?

NATE gets up and walks out of the room. BETTE is exasperated.

She sits at the table and pulls the letter out of her pocket. She stares at it. EDDIE enters. He gets some ice out of the freezer and holds it against his arm. BETTE sees.

BETTE

Did some of the grease get on you?

EDDIE

Must have.

BETTE

Here, we have some burn ointment.

BETTE gets up, leaving the letter on the table. EDDIE sits down in front of it. While she digs around for the ointment, he reads. His mouth drops open.

EDDIE

Bette... what is this?

She looks up and sees what he's reading. She darts across the room and grabs the letter off the table.

BETTE

Forget about it.

EDDIE

NYU? Bette. NYU?!?

BETTE

Please be quiet.

EDDIE

Is that real?

BETTE

Yes.

EDDIE

How... I didn't even know you applied.

BETTE

I didn't tell anyone. It... I didn't think I'd get in.

EDDIE

That's amazing!

BETTE

Yeah. Well, it doesn't matter. I'm not going.

EDDIE

Why the hell not?

BETTE

Look around, Eddie. Dad is a mess. Nate is falling apart. And even if they weren't, we can't afford it.

EDDIE

No, you can! We had this counselor come and talk to us and you can get scholarships and loans and basically go for free.

BETTE

Loans aren't free, Eddie.

EDDIE

For a while they are.

BETTE

Look, it's impossible, okay? It would be selfish to go.

EDDIE

So be selfish!

BETTE

Like my mom?

EDDIE

Leaving for the best freaking college in the country is nothing like skipping out on your family. You aren't like your mom for wanting to go to college.

BETTE

It feels the same.

EDDIE

You should tell your dad and see how he feels.

BETTE

I will. I'm trying to. I just know that he's already stressed and this is going to be more stressful.

EDDIE

Or it'll be so stupid exciting for him.

BETTE

(with a small laugh)

Maybe. But I'm not ready yet. So don't say anything to him or Nate, okay?

BETTE rests her head on EDDIE's shoulder.

EDDIE

(breathless)

Whatever you want.

BETTE

Thanks. You're the best, Eddie.

EDDIE is visibly thrilled by BETTE's praise and touch.

EDDIE

No, you are.

BETTE

No, you are.

EDDIE turns to face her so her head comes off of his shoulder.

EDDIE

I love you.

BETTE

I love you, too, buddy.

EDDIE

No. That's not what I mean. You are smart and beautiful and nice.

BETTE

You're flattering me.

EDDIE

I'm saying that... I love all of those things about you.

BETTE

You're all those things, too -

EDDIE

I want to be your boyfriend.

BETTE

Oh, Eddie... honey. Thank you so much -

EDDIE

Thank you?

BETTE

You're like my brother. I love you like you're my brother.

EDDIE turns away from her, hot
tears starting down his cheeks.

BETTE

Eddie... I'm sorry. I can't tell you how much I appreciate what you said. It's just not the... you are so amazing and you are going to find a girl your age that sees that.

EDDIE

I don't care about any other girl.

BETTE

But you will. There are so many people you haven't met yet. Or people that you've met that you haven't seen in that way -

EDDIE

I want to be with you. I want to marry you and be a part of this family for real.

BETTE nods.

BETTE

Eddie, you don't need to marry me to be a part of this family. We already feel like you are.

EDDIE

Stop. Please. I don't want to talk anymore.

EDDIE gets up from the table and starts for the basement.

BETTE

Sure. We can stop talking.

EDDIE

Thanks.

He runs downstairs and starts rummaging around for the vodka bottle again. After a moment, BETTE follows him down.

BETTE

Eddie?

He chokes on the vodka and tries to hide it behind his back. BETTE sees.

EDDIE

What?

BETTE

I just wanted to let you know how incredibly important you are to me. I do love you.

EDDIE

Thanks.

They keep eye contact for a few moments, neither prepared to address the vodka.

BETTE

I'll be upstairs if you need me.

BETTE walks up the stairs and flops down onto the couch. She looks at the letter and puts it down next to her.

NATE walks into the living room with a bag. He stops when he sees BETTE.

BETTE

You're leaving.

NATE

Just waiting to hear back from Mom.

BETTE nods.

NATE

You're not going to stop me?

BETTE

Is there anything I could say to make you change your mind?

NATE

No.

BETTE

So why waste my breath?

NATE sits in a chair across from
BETTE.

NATE

You excited for college?

BETTE laughs bitterly.

BETTE

Yeah, stoked. Thanks for asking.

NATE

If you don't want to go, don't go.

BETTE

That's not what I... it doesn't matter.

NATE

You're really smart. You'll probably do well and get a great job and have an awesome life.

BETTE

You don't think you'll do all those things?

NATE

Well, they don't give scholarships for skateboarding so... I don't know, if skating ends up in the Olympics and I'm good enough.

BETTE

You're a smart kid, Nate. I don't know why you don't see it.

NATE

I don't do well at school.

BETTE

That doesn't mean anything. There are all different kinds of smart. School is only one kind. You're so quick. Someone says something and you fire right back. I can barely keep up with you. You're smart.

NATE

Dad doesn't think so.

BETTE

Dad just wants you to have every opportunity he didn't have. Being a fire fighter wasn't his dream. But it was a good job so he took it.

NATE

What did he want to do?

BETTE

Dad wanted to design buildings. Big sky scrapers.

NATE

In Duane, Colorado? We don't even have a three story house here.

BETTE

No, he wanted to go to Denver.

NATE

Why didn't he?

BETTE gestures to herself.

BETTE

He's been in the department for 18 years.

NATE

Shit. I never thought about it.

BETTE

If you think you're a disappointment to Dad, just remember that I'm the reason he's here at all.

NATE

Bette, you know that -

The front door opens and PAUL
rushes in.

PAUL

Bette! Nate!

BETTE and NATE both jump up. NATE
slides his bag under the chair.

NATE

What?

PAUL

Get your stuff. We have to leave. The fire is coming right
for us.

BETTE

Do you think it'll burn down the house?

PAUL

I don't know, but I don't want to watch it firsthand. Let's
go. Only the things you absolutely need and then get in the
car.

BETTE starts for her room, but sees
NATE with the phone.

BETTE

What are you doing?

NATE

I'm calling Mom.

BETTE

Are you kidding me?? Give me the phone!

NATE

Mom is coming to get me. I have to tell her to come now.

PAUL

Your mom? Your mom is coming here?

BETTE

No. She's lying to you, Nate.

NATE

No, she just needed time to get her place ready.

PAUL

What place?

NATE

She got an apartment.

PAUL

(laughing)

With what money?

NATE stares at him defiantly.

NATE

The money in the casserole dish.

PAUL

You took it?

NATE

It wasn't just yours to keep. It belonged to both of you.

PAUL

No it didn't.

NATE

It was from your joint account with mom.

PAUL

That we were using to save for Bette. For college. Damn it, Nate!

NATE

(flustered)

Mom said it was both of yours. And that you stole it.

PAUL

I took it out so that she couldn't. So that it would be used for what it was supposed to be. She'd already emptied your college fund.

NATE

I don't believe you.

PAUL

Well, I don't give a damn. I just want you to get your shit and get in the damn car.

NATE is beside himself. BETTE tries to comfort him.

BETTE

It's okay, Nate. She's done it to me, too.

BETTE tries to hug him and he pushes her away and runs out of the living room.

PAUL

Five minutes! You're in the car or I'm leaving you!

NATE runs into the basement.

PAUL turns to BETTE. Her stare takes all the strength out of him and he sinks to the couch, head in his hands.

PAUL

I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry.

BETTE

It's not your fault. And it doesn't matter. We all just have to pull ourselves together and make sure everyone is safe.

PAUL hugs her tightly then collects himself.

PAUL

Go get your stuff together.

BETTE leaves for her room. PAUL takes a minute then does the same.

In the basement, NATE is rummaging through stuff. EDDIE is on the couch.

EDDIE

What are you looking for?

NATE

The downstairs portable. Where is it?

EDDIE

Is it in the cradle?

NATE

No, that's why I'm looking for it. I need to call my mom.

EDDIE

Why are you calling your mom?

NATE

Because I need her.

EDDIE

She's never going to be what you want her to be.

NATE looks at EDDIE.

NATE

Are you drunk?

EDDIE holds up the bottle.

EDDIE

Oh yeah, it looks like it.

NATE

Jesus. The fucking forest fire is right outside and you're getting trashed in the basement.

EDDIE

You think I don't know.

NATE

What?

EDDIE

How it feels. You think because my mom is at home that I don't know what it's like to be without a mom.

NATE

I don't know what you're talking about, man. You're slurring your words.

EDDIE

But it's like... she's never going to love you. Doesn't matter if you're good or bad. Doesn't matter if you get good grades. Because you know what she loves?

NATE doesn't answer.

EDDIE

Do you? Do you know?

NATE

No, man. I don't know what your mom loves.

EDDIE

Nothing. My mom and your mom. They hate themselves too much to love anything or anyone.

NATE stops looking. He glares at
EDDIE.

NATE

You can talk about your own mom, Eddie. You can't talk about mine.

EDDIE

You know how I know? I have a secret for how.

NATE

Dude. Will you please just get your shit and go up to the car?

EDDIE

Because I hate myself, too. And I thought I loved someone else. But I think I was wrong.

I think I was wrong about that. Because she can't love me. So how can I love someone? And how can someone love me?

EDDIE looks at NATE intensely.

EDDIE

You have it, man. Your dad and Bette. You have it. Don't be a fucking asshole and throw them away for someone that can't give you that.

NATE walks away from EDDIE, he climbs slowly up the stairs.

NATE

Get up. If you stay here, you're going to burn to death.

NATE walks upstairs. He passes BETTE in the hall.

BETTE

You have your stuff?

NATE ignores her.

BETTE

Two minutes, Nate!

NATE heads to his room.

BETTE

Will you grab my toothbrush from the bathroom? Nate?

He doesn't answer. Rolling her eyes, BETTE heads to the bathroom to get her toothbrush.

EDDIE, forgotten in the basement, stumbles up the steps and to the front door. He sheds his t-shirt and opens the door. Heat and smoke meet him. Intense and painful. He walks out into it, leaving the door open.

BETTE comes out of the bathroom, remembering EDDIE. She calls down from the kitchen.

BETTE

Eddie? Eddie, we have to go. The fire is getting close. Eddie?

She goes downstairs and sees the basement empty. She comes back upstairs.

BETTE

Nate? Is Eddie with you?

NATE (O.S.)

No. Fuck off.

BETTE sees the open front door. She goes to it.

BETTE

Eddie?

She goes outside.

Nate carries his broken skateboard into the living room. Seeing smoke streaming in the open door, he closes it.

NATE

Jesus.

He flops down on the couch. He hears the sound of crumbling paper as he sits. He pulls BETTE's letter out from underneath him and tosses it to the floor.

PAUL enters.

PAUL

You ready?

NATE

Yes.

PAUL

Where's your sister?

NATE

Fuck if I know.

PAUL

Hey, Nate. Cut it out. I know you're hurt. I know you're mad. So is everyone else. So you can stay hurt and mad, but remember that the people in this house sacrificed for you. They dealt with your bullshit. And sometimes we didn't do the best job, but it was the best we could do. It won't kill you to push your teenage angst aside for a second to appreciate that.

NATE stares at the floor.

NATE

I just want my mom.

PAUL

Well me, too.

NATE looks up at PAUL. A little bit of understanding is growing.

PAUL

Go get your sister, okay?

NATE gets up and heads for BETTE's room.

PAUL sees the letter on the ground. He picks it up and reads. His eyes widen. He looks around in awe, not knowing what to do. He smiles and laughs to himself in disbelief.

PAUL

Oh my god.

He whoops.

PAUL

Oh my god! Bette! Bette! Get over here!

NATE appears.

NATE

She's not in her room.

PAUL

Where'd she go?

NATE

The basement?

PAUL

With Eddie. Shit, Eddie!

PAUL runs to the basement.

PAUL

Bette? Eddie?

No one is there.

PAUL

(yelling upstairs)

Did she take stuff out to the car?

NATE opens the door. He squints out as smoke billows in. He sees something.

NATE

Dad... Dad!!!

PAUL bounds up the stairs as NATE runs out the door.

NATE

DAD!!!

PAUL hits the living room just as NATE enters followed by EDDIE carrying BETTE.

EDDIE

Help.

PAUL dives for his daughter. Her head is bleeding and she's covered in dirt and soot.

PAUL

What happened?

No one speaks.

PAUL

What happened??

PAUL leans down and listens for breathing. He starts CPR.

OFFICER COLTON appears.

OFFICER COLTON

What happened?

PAUL continues CPR as he speaks.

PAUL

She went after Eddie. The fire was closer than I thought. It was right in our backyard. She couldn't see from the smoke. She was stumbling around and got right under that old tree in the backyard. Right as a branch snapped.

NATE runs for the phone and dials.

NATE

I need an ambulance.

PAUL

I kept doing CPR until the ambulance got there, but it was like walking through mud.

Lights dim on the house. PAUL slowly gets up and walks back into the interview room. His shirt is stained with blood and soot. He stands in the corner.

PAUL

The smoke made it impossible for me to get a full breath and I could feel the heat from the fire outside. I didn't know whether to keep going or pick her up and try to make a run for it. I just kept trying to get enough air for her. But the fire -

OFFICER COLTON leans over and turns
off the tape recorder.

OFFICER COLTON

What are you trying to do here, Paul? Is this a grab for an insanity plea?

PAUL

I'm telling you what happened.

OFFICER COLTON

What did I say? I said I'm trying to help you.

PAUL

I know. And I'm cooperating. I'm telling my story.

OFFICER COLTON

You're telling a story, yeah.

PAUL

Yeah. What's the problem?

OFFICER COLTON

The problem is that we're back to the same place as when we picked you up.

PAUL stares at the floor, shaking
his head.

PAUL

You're playing mind games with me.

OFFICER COLTON

I'm not Paul. I'm honestly trying -

PAUL

No, because I know that the forest fire was outside. It was right outside the door. The smoke was pouring in -

OFFICER COLTON

The fire didn't come near your house. It turned west and up the mountain. The smoke was pushed away from you.

PAUL

Then it was the one that was in the house. It came up from the basement and spread into the kitchen and out under the tree.

OFFICER COLTON

Eddie? You're saying Eddie killed her.

PAUL

Eddie... No...

PAUL looks down at his hands.

PAUL

I thought it was. I thought it was Eddie. Because he was like fuel. Making it bigger, hotter. But no. I couldn't see it, Jess. I've spent the past year trying not to see everything going up in smoke and I didn't see her suffocating. But I know what it was now.

OFFICER COLTON

What?

PAUL walks to the two-way mirror and looks into it.

PAUL

Me.

In the reflection, we can see flames dancing off of PAUL, consuming him.

END OF PLAY.