

Lines in the Sand

a full-length play

by

Jim Dalglish

“It gets better.” That’s what the high school teachers, coaches, and counselors tell Billy. He knows that’s bullshit. So does Tom, the middle-aged man who rescues him from a gang of violent senior boys. Tom seems like the kind of guy Billy needs in his life. But when he gets into Tom’s car, can Billy trust where this older man is about to take him?

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Productions

Cotuit Center for the Arts, Cotuit, MA, March, 2017

International Dublin Gay Theatre Festival, Dublin, IR, May, 2017

The Jewel Box Theatre at The WorkShop, New York, NY, August, 2017

Awards

2017 International Dublin Theatre Festival:

Nominee: Best New Play (Jim Dalglish) and Best Aspect of Production (Jackie Reeves)

Winner: Best Actor (Tony Travostino & Nick Bucchianeri)

South Shore Theatre Critic:

2017 Best Male Performances New England (Tony Travostino & Nick Bucchianeri)

Reviews

"... a string of surprise twists transform the play from an intense, unnerving mystery to an equally intense but ultimately moving drama... the story is engaging, with terrific performances... The play takes place over a period of less than 24 hours, and packs a wallop... By intermission on this particular night, several members of the audience seemed visibly overwhelmed... it is worth seeing for its unforgiving look at complicated people in extraordinary circumstances, and for the food for thought it offers the audience about bullying, self-judgment, trust and mistakes."

- Kay Keough, The Inquirer and Mirror

"Thought-provoking, gripping piece of theatre... Tautly directed by the playwright and Ian Ryan, the 90-minute play moves along at a crisp pace. Just when you think you have it figured out, the plot takes off in another direction before it results in a shocking revelation."

- Johanna Crosby, Barnstable Patriot

"'Lines In The Sand' by Jim Dalglish is a real thriller on so many levels. It is a dramatic thriller as this older man rescues a 15-year-old boy from a violent altercation in the woods. Why has he been stalking him? It is a production thrill in the quality of the on stage work at all levels. This very fine production co-directed by Dalglish and Ian Ryan is edgy, atmospheric and gripping. You won't have seen a play quite like this before under the banner of lgbt theatre and you won't wonder why it is such a worthy inclusion in the programme – it is so well done."

- IDGTF

"Well written and executed... The acting by both performers is outstanding. Raw, emotional, and believable, Mr. Dalglish has written a script that's both gritty and, in some instances, lyrical."

- Joanne Brina-Gartner, The Enterprise

"A two-hander by nature is extremely dependent on the skills of the actors portraying the two roles, and in this case they're exemplary. Both Bucchianeri (belying his age and relative inexperience) and Travostino (so memorable in the former play, Unsafe) are, to use an adjective too often loosely applied, riveting. In such a tiny black box, each threatens to blow the place apart. As Directed by Dalglish and Ian Ryan, they come close to doing just that. The play has been selected to be performed at the fourteenth annual International Dublin Gay Theatre Festival this May, and it's easy to see why. Presented here with Artwork by Jackie Reeves and Original Music by Sam Holmstock, it's another example of Dalglish's mixing of powerful "in your face" writing and wise restraint, not a mix that an awful lot of playwrights have the wit to threaten as well as to withhold."

- Jack Craib, South Shore Critic

Playwright's Notes

"Lines in the Sand" is not an easy play. A play you can sit back and watch for 90 minutes, smile a few times, and then go home content with yourself and the choices you have made with your life. I didn't want to write an easy play. I wanted to write a play that would take people to places they were unprepared to go. To coax them to empathize with people they may not normally feel any sympathy. To re-evaluate their pre-conceived notions of crime, rehabilitation, faith and forgiveness. I wrote the play to change people's lives.

Over the course of the play, my two characters – an ex-con and a 15-year-old boy who picks up men in public parks – take the audience on a journey that will make them look at masculinity, sexuality, paternal relationships, and faith from a new perspective.

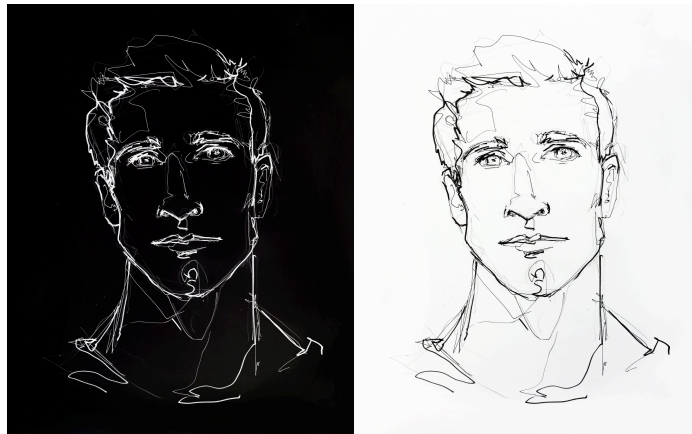
Blurb

"It gets better." That's what the high school teachers, coaches, and counselors tell Billy. He knows that's bullshit. So does Tom, the middle-aged man who rescues him from a gang of violent senior boys. Tom seems like the kind of guy Billy needs in his life. But when he gets into Tom's car, can Billy trust where this older man is about to take him?

Production Concept

The Cotuit Center for the Arts production of the play, which traveled to Dublin and New York City, used minimal props and set pieces. A few large cubes, a table, and two benches were used for the set. Props were kept to a minimum – only the most essential pieces were used. Settings and sketchbook drawings were projected on the back wall of the stage. These were negative versions of sketches drawn by Jackie Reeves to resemble the illustrations Billy creates in his sketchbook. They were animated to appear to emerge from the black back wall of the stage. Extensive sound effects were used to convey the settings as well as the action on stage – gunshots, urine flowing into a urinal, police sirens, etc. A soundtrack consisting of drums and African xylophone was composed by Sam Holmstock.

Example Sketches:



Play Themes

Rape. Sexual Assault. Bullying. Gay Youth. Coming Out. Toxic Masculinity. Father/Son Relationships. Sexual Harassment. Male Violence. Pedophilia. Hazing. Penal Reform. Abortion. Catholic Faith. Forgiveness.

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Characters

Boy – Fifteen years old. Scrawny and a little timid. A talented sketch artist who would give anything for his life to be as beautiful as his drawings.

Man – Thirty three years old. Something in his face betrays hard times. He would give anything to fix the things in his life that he has broken.

Setting

Place

A small American town.

Time

Spring. Just before everything wakes up.

Act 1

(Lights up.

The men's rest room in a diner on the edge of a small American town.

BOY enters in a hurry. He places his book bag on the floor and looks at his face in the mirror. His nose is bleeding and he has a cut over his eye. His other eye looks sore and will turn black over the course of the next hour or so. He is shocked by what he sees. He turns on the water and looks at his hands. They have blood on them. He washes them off.

He washes off his face.

He looks into the mirror again. He has not stopped bleeding. His eyes well up and he begins to hyperventilate.

He hears footsteps.

He looks at the door. The steps are approaching.

BOY rushes into the bathroom stall and latches the door behind him. He steps onto the toilet so that his feet are not visible under the partition.

MAN enters the bathroom. He looks around. Nothing. He crosses to the stall and tries the door.

Locked.

He bends over and looks under the partition.

No feet.

He is about to leave, when he sees the book bag on the floor next to the sink.

He smiles.

He crosses to the door he came in through and locks it. He places the book bag on the counter next to the sink.

He goes to the urinal. Unzips. Pulls it out. And lets loose. He whistles as he pisses.

He finishes. Shakes. Tucks. Zips. Flushes. Steps back and waits.

Silence except for the drip of the faucet.)

MAN

I know you're in there.

(Silence.)

I got your book bag.

Boy

Give it to me.

Man

Come and get it.

(After a moment, BOY opens the stall door and peers out.)

Boy

They out there?

Man

Always somebody out there.

(BOY rushes to the sink, grabs his book bag and is about to leave when MAN grabs the strap and stops him in his tracks.)

You'll stain that pretty little blouse if you don't take care of that cut.

(BOY takes the book bag off and washes his face in the sink. He looks into the mirror. The cut is still bleeding. He begins to hyperventilate again.)

MAN crosses up behind BOY and touches his shoulder. BOY jerks away from him and stumbles back against the stall partition.)

Easy.

(MAN takes a few paper towels out of the dispenser. BOY tries to get past MAN, but MAN gently pushes him back against the stall partition. MAN folds paper towels and wets them under the faucet.)

He tries to put the paper towels on the cut above BOY's eye, but BOY flinches and cowers. MAN takes BOY's chin with his free hand and waits for him to open his eyes.)

Gotta work on that.

Boy

What are you doing?

Man

What do you think?

(MAN covers the cut above BOY's eye with the paper towels.)

There is a moment where they look into each other's eyes.

The moment is interrupted by someone attempting to enter the men's room by trying the locked doorknob.

BOY starts, but MAN holds him against the stall partition.)

(To the door:) Use the ladies!

BOY

Is it them?

MAN

No.

BOY

How do you know?

MAN

I took care of that.

BOY

How?

MAN

If you hadn't run off you'd know.

BOY

You hurt them?

(MAN shows BOY the dried blood on the knuckles of his free hand.)

MAN

What does it look like?

(MAN grabs BOY's hand and places it on the paper towels.)

Hold it.

(MAN washes the dried blood off his hands in the sink.)

You know those guys were hiding in the woods?

BOY

No.

MAN

Why you let that kid tie your hands with the scarf?

(BOY looks away. MAN grabs BOY's chin again.)

Look at me.

(BOY flinches again and cowers.)

Okay. This is what I'm talking about. You gotta fix that.

(MAN grabs BOY's chin.)

Look at me.

(BOY won't look.)

Look!

(MAN slaps BOY's face.

BOY looks into MAN's eyes.

BOY pushes man back.)

That's it. Why didn't you do that before?

(Silence.)

They always play so rough?

Boy

Why didn't you stop it sooner?

MAN

Looked like you were enjoying it.

(BOY pushes MAN. MAN pushes back. BOY punches MAN in gut. MAN barely reacts. MAN slaps BOY across his face. BOY begins to cower. Then punches MAN again in the gut. MAN slaps BOY again. He cowers. MAN lifts his face back up. MAN slaps BOY. But BOY does not cower. He looks MAN in the eye.)

Better.

(BOY puts his hand to his face where he had been slapped.)

That hurt?

(BOY puts his hand back down.)

Did that hurt?

Boy

Yeah.

MAN

For how long?

(BOY shrugs.)

Does it hurt now?

Boy

No.

MAN

The names they called you tonight. Out there in the woods. That still hurt?

(BOY nods. MAN grabs more paper towels, wets them.)

Sticks and stones? That's bullshit. Taking a punch? Two seconds, it's over. It's living with the words. They have a way of getting inside like slow-acting poison. Because no matter what bullshit they spout. There's this little part of you that believes them. That's what kills you.

(MAN wipes blood off BOY's forehead. BOY lets him.)

That big one's got a helluva right hook. He tagged you good.

BOY

I need stitches?

MAN

Nah. It's just a bleeder.

(Door rattles again.)

(To door:) It's busy!

BOY

Why did you lock the door?

MAN

I thought we needed some privacy.

(BOY backs up.)

BOY

Why?

MAN

You got the wrong idea.

BOY

You some kind of perv?

MAN

When that kid took you into the woods, you must have known what he wanted. But you didn't call the cops. Why is that?

(BOY looks down.)

We both know.

BOY

I didn't want that.

MAN

You didn't think it was going to get rough. Maybe you didn't think his buddies were waiting.

Boy

Why didn't *you* call the cops?

Man

I handled it. Didn't I?

Boy

There were five of them.

Man

All you have to do is say *Thank You*.

Boy

That's all you want?

Man

Say, *Thank you*. For saving your ass. That's all.

(BOY considers for a moment.)

Boy

Thank you.

Man

Good boy.

(MAN holds BOY's head and looks closely at the cut.)

It stopped bleeding.

Boy

My eye?

Man

Gonna be a real shiner. Give you something to show off at school.

Boy

Can't go back there.

Man

You stand up straight and proud and you look those little bitches in the eye. Like you did just now to me. Okay?

(BOY tries to look down. MAN grabs his chin. BOY looks him in the eye.)

Okay?

(BOY nods head.)

Good boy.

(BOY puts his hand on MAN's hand as it holds his face. He looks into MAN's eyes. There is a moment of connection. This makes MAN uncomfortable. He lets BOY go.)

You hungry?

BOY

Yeah.

MAN

Can I get you dinner?

BOY

Where?

MAN

We're in a diner.

BOY

Food sucks here.

(MAN laughs.)

The burgers are okay.

MAN

You like fries? I like fries.

(Lights out.)

(Lights up.

Diner Interior. Booth table. Window. Buzzing neon sign. Miniature jukebox. Naugahyde seats. Half-eaten cheeseburger. Large plate of fries. Chocolate shake – almost empty.

BOY sits across from MAN.)

BOY

It gets better.

MAN

Where'd you get that?

BOY

You kidding? It's everywhere. *It gets better.* Yeah? When? What about now? What about the dog shit they smear on my locker... the shit they say when I walk down the hall...

MAN

It gets better? That's bullshit.

BOY

You go to the principal's office... the counselors...

MAN

...That's not going to help...

BOY

It gets better.

MAN

You rat on them, they'll just be more careful...

BOY

...Great...

MAN

You know why they go after you?

BOY

Because they're assholes?

MAN

Because inside they're scared little dipshits.

BOY

Why pick on me?

MAN

Putting down a guy like you is the easiest way to cover it. You're a good student.
Right?

(MAN reaches over and grabs the book bag from off the booth bench.)

BOY

Hey!

(MAN opens bag and begins to pull books out. BOY tries to stop him.)

MAN

Biology. Geometry.

BOY

Put them back.

(MAN pulls out an instrument case.)

MAN

Band?

(Opens it. It's a flute.)

Figures.

BOY

Fuck off.

(MAN pulls out note cards bound with a rubber band.)

MAN

What's with the cards?

BOY

Debate.

MAN

Write for the newspaper?

(BOY stares at MAN.)

Class play?

(BOY stares at MAN.)

Student Council?

(BOY stares at MAN.)

When do you have time to study?

BOY

Classes are a joke.

MAN

Have a sport?

BOY

Track. I suck.

MAN

Trying to run away from a lot.

BOY

Two and a half years I'm getting the fuck out of this hellhole.

MAN

What are you going to do till then? Just keep taking it? Bury yourself in books and choir and chess club, trying to be the perfect boy everyone should love.

(MAN removes sketchbook from bag.)

BOY

Don't!

(MAN pushes BOY's hands away and opens sketchbook.)

MAN

You do these?

(MAN is impressed by the sketches. He can't help but smile.)

Boy

Give it back.

(MAN laughs.)

Fuck you.

MAN

These are good. How long you been doing this?

(BOY shrugs.)

I like the swan.

Boy

I didn't get the head right.

MAN

Looks good to me. Who's this?

Boy

Track coach.

MAN

He a good guy?

(BOY nods. MAN holds up another sketch.)

Boy

Rhonda.

MAN

Girlfriend?

Boy

Best friend.

(MAN laughs.)

Fuck off.

MAN

What's this?

Boy

Old house.

MAN

Grandmother?

Boy

How'd you know?

MAN

Good guess.

(MAN is obviously pleased by what he sees.)

How'd you... Who taught you to...

BOY

You're laughing at me.

MAN

No. I just can't believe...

BOY

Stop looking at me like that.

MAN

You want to do this. I mean... For real?

BOY

Just scribbles.

MAN

It's more than that.

BOY

What are you... some kind of art critic?

MAN

Just a few lines. And you see... How do you do that?

BOY

Negative space. What's left blank is just as important as what you can see.

MAN

Negative space.

BOY

You got to fill it in with your mind.

MAN

You make me do some of the work.

BOY

I guess.

(MAN turns the page and is struck by what he sees. BOY looks down and tries to pull the sketchpad away. MAN stops him.)

MAN

Boy with the red scarf? One who took you into the woods?

(BOY looks down.)

BOY

Kyle.

MAN

Pretty Boy know about this?

(BOY doesn't answer.)

That negative space you were talking about. A little dangerous when you don't get it right. Or maybe you had your reasons for getting it wrong.

Is that why you followed him into the brush? Why you let him tie your hands with the scarf. You thought it was just fun and games. Was he a good fuck? Before tonight?

(BOY won't meet his eyes.)

Why'd he call in his boys? You like gang bangs.

BOY

Did it look like it?

MAN

His boys find out?

BOY

He tried to stop them.

(MAN laughs.)

Shut up.

MAN

I heard him all right: *Go easy on him.*

BOY

They made him do it.

MAN

Oh yeah. That's what it looked like. He take your cherry?

BOY

You disappointed?

MAN

What the fuck...?

BOY

I've seen you. The past couple of days. Piece-of-shit green truck. A few blocks from school. That's you. Right? I walk by. You're reading the paper... real subtle. Same routine after class. Only you're in the DQ lot across the street. What happen on Thursday? You score an eighth grader? Why me? Something about me that you can just smell?

MAN

You think that's why?

Boy

What else could it be?

MAN

Why didn't you call the cops if that's what you thought? Why not call them now?

(MAN puts his flip phone on the table.)

Be my guest.

(BOY does not reach for the phone.)

I tell you what.

(MAN reaches into the wallet and throws some bills on the table.)

Here. Should cover the meal and a nice tip. Good luck walking back home in the dark. Maybe those guys are still hanging around. You gonna take the shortcut through the woods?

(MAN gets up to leave. BOY stops him.)

Boy

Don't go.

MAN

I rescue your ass. I put my neck out for you. Take all five of those punks on and what do I get? This pedo... perv shit? What do you think would be happening right now if I hadn't come along? You'd be bleeding into your soiled boxers as you limped home. You want to call the police, go on. No skin off my ass. Go ahead. Call.

(BOY takes the phone. He pauses.)

Did I come up to you? Did I make you do anything? I saved your little white ass. They should give me a goddam medal.

(BOY puts the phone back down on the table.)

Boy

Nice phone. Buttons. Flip. Special.

MAN

You got a mouth on you.

(MAN laughs.)

You think I wanted to hurt you?

(BOY looks at MAN.)

If that's what you think, why are you sitting there right now?

I'm not done with my burger.

BOY

(MAN laughs.)

How is it?

MAN

Sucks.

BOY

Fries?

MAN

They're good. Want some.

BOY

I'm okay.

MAN

(BOY sucks on the straw. The shake is gone and the straw makes a sucking sound. BOY keeps sucking. MAN laughs.)

What?

BOY

Want me to get you another one?

MAN

(MAN looks around, but can't find the waitress.)

Where the hell did she go?

I'm good.

BOY

How's the eye?

MAN

Hurts.

BOY

(MAN takes ice out of his water glass and wraps a napkin around it. He places it on side of BOY's face. BOY takes over holding the napkin.)

Thanks.

You didn't grow up here, did you?

MAN

What makes you think that?

BOY

(MAN shrugs.)

MAN

Where you grow up?

BOY

Someplace you never heard of.

MAN

Why you leave?

BOY

Beats the hell out of me.

MAN

When did you move?

BOY

Two years ago.

MAN

Miss the old place?

BOY

Yeah. Grandparents mostly. My friends.

MAN

No dad?

BOY

Everybody's got a dad. Some people just don't know who he is.

MAN

You never asked?

BOY

You want to see her go over the edge, just ask. He must have been a real asshole.

MAN

Maybe he had his reasons.

BOY

I'm sure they were good.

MAN

So... two years back you and your mom just took off.

BOY

She got something in the mail and totally freaked.

MAN

What was it?

BOY

Fuck should I know. I heard her talking to Gran. It was like an explosion. Within two days we were packed and barreling down the highway to god knows where. She wouldn't let me say goodbye to my friends. I'm not even supposed to talk to them.

MAN

She must have had her reasons.

BOY

She's keeping them to herself.

MAN

Why here?

BOY

She liked the church. It was Sunday. We went to mass and when it was over she said, "This is it."

MAN

Good a reason as any.

BOY

You nuts? This place is a shithole.

MAN

Seen worse.

BOY

Where? It's like a prison. You know what that's like?

MAN

Yeah.

BOY

You do?

(MAN doesn't answer.)

So I was right. God. Prison.

MAN

I made a mistake.

BOY

Hard to give up, huh?

MAN

That's behind me.

BOY

Which one are you?

MAN

What do you mean?

Boy

Bill? Mike? Pete?

Man

What are you talking about?

Boy

Online. You one of the assholes who didn't show at the park? What? Lose your nerve?

Man

I'm not one of those.

Boy

Did Scotty tell you about me? Tell him to stick with his wife and three kids and leave me alone.

Man

You meet these guys online?

(BOY doesn't respond.)

They know you're under age?

Boy

I'm 15. It's my body. I should be able to do anything I want with it.

Man

You feel good about what you do online?

Boy

What am I supposed to do?

(MAN takes sugar canister and pours sugar over the table top.)

What the hell?

Man

It's just sugar. Relax. You gotta draw the line. Someone comes after you. Wants something from you, you don't want to give... You draw the line.

(MAN uses his finger to draw a line through the pile of sugar.)

Boy

And if he doesn't give a shit?

Man

You fight for that line with everything you've got. Some ass want you to think the same way he does and you don't see eye-to-eye... draw another line.

(MAN draws another line at a right angle to the first.)

He wants you to say something you don't want to say... another line.

(MAN draws another line at a right angle to the second.)

He wants you to do something you don't want to do... another one.

(MAN draws a fourth line and completes the square.)

And you hold them. Because inside those lines... that's you. Who you are. You are a boy now. But you draw those lines... Hold them... First step to being a man.

BOY

(Ironically:) I was wondering how that works.

MAN

You need some friends who are boys.

BOY

They don't like me.

MAN

You're afraid of them.

BOY

Duh.

MAN

There's got to be some guys you can...

BOY

At this school there're three kinds of guys: jocks, tools, and a bunch of white guys in hoodies and pants so low their asses hang out. The jocks call them Wiggers. Have you listened to any of them? *Bro... Dude.... Chill, dude. I'm chilling, bro. Want some weed? You chilling, dude? Let's chill. Epic fail on the chill, dude. Get chill, bro. Bitching chill. Awesome weed. Are we chill, dude, or are we chill?* Even the smart ones. Because you either gotta be tough, act tough or sound stupid.

MAN

You got to figure out a way...

BOY

They don't like me.

MAN

What do you give them to like? You have a lot more than you think.

(Pause.)

Why did those boys call you *Billy*?

(BOY looks at MAN.)

Hold still, Billy boy. You'll like it! Why they call you Billy?

BILLY

It's my name.

MAN

No, it's not.

BILLY

Yeah?

MAN

Yeah.

BILLY

What makes you think so?

(MAN points to the cover of the sketchbook.)

MAN

Name on the cover of your sketchbook. Name you used to sign each drawing.

(MAN points to a signature.)

Christian. How you explain that?

BILLY

It's my pseudonym.

MAN

Pseudonym.

BILLY

You know what that is. Right?

MAN

I know what a pseudonym is.

BILLY

A lot of artists have them.

MAN

Christian. Why you choose that one?

BILLY

None of your business.

MAN

Okay.

BILLY

What's your name?

(MAN doesn't answer.)

Yah. I didn't think you'd tell. What are you afraid of?

(MAN doesn't answer.)

I think I know.

(BILLY slides out of the booth and grabs his backpack.)

MAN

Where you going?

BILLY

The bathroom.

(MAN stops him by grabbing the backpack.)

MAN

Taking your stuff?

(BILLY stares at MAN.)

You afraid I'm going to rip you off? Or are you thinking of slipping out the back?

(BILLY stares at MAN.)

Either way is fine. Don't worry about dinner. It's on me.

BILLY

Thanks.

MAN

You're welcome.

(BILLY exits with his backpack.

MAN waits for a beat. He glances back to where BILLY exited.

Nothing.

He turns and picks up the bill. He looks at the figures and calculates the tip. He takes the bills he threw on the table and picks up a few. He leaves a twenty on the table, puts the rest in his wallet and returns it to his back pants pocket.

He looks around and gestures to the waitress to say he's paid the bill. Then he looks to see if anyone is looking. No one is.

He takes a Ruger 9 mm semiautomatic pistol out of the breast pocket of his jacket. He removes the magazine and shoves the clip into his pants pocket. He returns the pistol to his jacket pocket.

He takes out a package of gum out of his jacket pocket. He removes a stick, unwraps it, pops it into his mouth, rolls the foil into a wad and drops it on the table. He returns the gum to his jacket pocket.

He chews for a beat.

He sighs.

He's about to get up and leave, when BILLY re-enters with his backpack. He crosses to the table and searches the bench he was sitting on and underneath the table.)

MAN

What's up?

BILLY

You take my phone?

MAN

No.

BILLY

Don't bullshit me.

MAN

I'm not.

BILLY

I need my phone.

MAN

We'll find it.

(Lights out.)

(Lights up.

Clearing in the woods. About a quarter mile behind the diner.

BILLY follows MAN as they enter.)

MAN

You sure you had it before you followed him into the woods?

(BILLY doesn't respond. He seems a little nervous. MAN notices.)

Don't worry. I took care of them. They're not coming back.

(MAN searches by kicking the leaves out of the way. BILLY doesn't do much of anything other than look around at the trees. He is remembering what had happened in the woods an hour before.)

BILLY

Call my phone.

MAN

No.

BILLY

When it rings...

MAN

No.

BILLY

Come on. 510 – 632...

MAN

I'm not calling your phone.

BILLY

Why?

MAN

You're a smart boy. Figure it out.

(They search.)

It should be somewhere near here.

BILLY

How can you tell?

(MAN picks up red scarf. He shows it to BILLY. BILLY takes it and tries to rip it. He's not strong enough. He wads it up and is about to throw it into the woods, but stops. He folds it carefully and puts it into his backpack. He sees that the MAN has watched him do this. He goes back to searching through the leaves on the ground.)

Too many leaves.

(MAN points to a large fallen tree trunk.)

MAN

This is where he led you. Pretty boy.

BILLY

Kyle.

MAN

What did he whisper as he tied your hands?

(No response. MAN waits it out.)

BILLY

Gotta do me a favor, Billy. Let them do it. Relax and it will be over quick.

MAN

Were they hiding over there behind the evergreens?

(BILLY nods his head.)

You know them?

(BILLY nods his head.)

They on one of his teams?

BILLY

He's not like them.

MAN

Try it, guys... Fucking smooth lay.

BILLY

He's not like that.

MAN

He was tonight.

BILLY

That's not him.

MAN

How you figure?

BILLY

Last summer at Boy Scout camp. He was nice to me. The only one. It was hell.

MAN

You are a boy scout?

BILLY

Shut up.

MAN

So. It was hell. Boy Scout camp.

(BILLY gives up on the story and searching for the phone and sits on the log.)

BILLY

We're not going to find it.

MAN

I'll look. You tell me about your boy scout.

BILLY

The older guys formed a club. The *Boner Brigade*.

MAN

What they do?

BILLY

Sneak into our tents at night. While we were sleeping. Hold us down and pull our shorts off. Smear shaving cream on our... on us... and threaten to shave us because we didn't deserve to have hair.

MAN

Where were the adults?

BILLY

Up on the hill in their own tent.

MAN

You say something?

BILLY

They laughed it off and said it was part of growing up.

MAN

What did your boyfriend say?

BILLY

He's not my... That it was no big deal. Just initiation. They made a flag.

(BILLY can't go on.)

MAN

Go on.

BILLY

Why do you care? Who the fuck are you?

MAN

Someone who will listen to this story. Anyone else do that for you?

BILLY

One asshole... Keith Anderson... He used to walk around with his dick hanging out. You know... (moving his hips back and forth and making a stupid face.)

MAN

He must have thought he really had something there.

BILLY

If you looked, he'd say *What you looking at, pecker peeper?*

MAN

Classy guy.

(Pause.)

BILLY

He and his buddies... They called themselves the *Boner Brigade*... They made a flag that was supposed to be the outline of Anderson's dick. When he ran the flag up, it was a sign for all his buddies to go into their tent.

MAN

You know what they were doing in there?

BILLY

No.

MAN

That it? Something you're not telling me?

BILLY

We were on a canoe trip. Across the lake from camp. Overnight. No tents. Just our sleeping bags and cheesecloth to keep the bugs from biting your face.

I woke up. Middle of the night. I thought it was raining. I opened my eyes. My mosquito net was missing. Four of them. Standing over me. They saw me wake up and ran into the woods. The next morning I came to the fire for breakfast. The Boner Brigade looked at me. Funniest thing they'd ever seen. I didn't know why until Kyle came over and told me I needed to wash up. It had dried on my face... in my hair. We went down to the lake and he helped me wash it off.

(Pause.)

Late that afternoon. On our way back across the lake. Kyle was in my canoe. Just us. A thunderstorm blew up. The rain hit. Wind really started to blow. Kyle called out *Stroke. Stroke. Stroke.* I tried real hard... But we couldn't keep up and got separated from the group. The wind drove us to the far side of the lake. A point with a bunch of boulders. We hauled the canoe up the rocks, tipped it over and took cover.

(MAN has seen something shiny under the leaves. The phone. He picks it up and is about to show it to BILLY. BILLY is in his own world. MAN puts the phone in his pocket instead.)

Then the lightening really started. Kyle kept counting from flash to bang. *Half a mile. Quarter mile. Eighth a mile.* It was right on top of us. But I didn't panic. I was brave. And Kyle saw that. He saw that I was an okay guy. Not just some retard. I was an okay guy. It blew all night. Really came down a few times. But with the rain slickers Kyle staked down over the canoe we stayed warm and dry. And the next morning... when it cleared... we hid the canoe and grabbed our packs and took off. Because we both had had enough of their shit. We had had enough and we took off.

MAN

They didn't come looking for you?

BILLY

We were always one step ahead.

MAN

Huh.

BILLY

For three days. Until it was time to get on the bus and head for home.

MAN

Three days in the woods. Must have been hungry.

BILLY

We ate berries and fish and... stuff we found.

MAN

Merit badges came in handy.

BILLY

Yes.

MAN

An adventure.

BILLY

Me and Kyle.

MAN

Huh.

BILLY

Swimming in the afternoon. Laying on the boulders on the shore under the sun.
Talking. Stuff we never told anyone else. He doesn't have it so easy.

MAN

Who does?

BILLY

But in the woods... No one watching or giving us shit. Doing whatever we wanted for
once. We were brave and strong and free.

MAN

Wild boys.

BILLY

On the last day we walked back into camp to get on the bus. Everyone just stared at
us.

(BILLY flips the bird to a group of imaginary boy scouts.)

MAN

That's quite the story.

(BILLY nods.)

So.... Kyle your buddy?

(BILLY nods.)

Maybe I have him wrong.

BILLY

You do.

MAN

Maybe there was a reason for tonight.

BILLY

Like what?

MAN

Maybe something you're forgetting to tell.

BILLY

I'm not.

MAN

Such a good guy. He must have his reasons.

BILLY

Why do you think he did it?

MAN

This wasn't your first time. With him here. Was it.

(BILLY can't look him in the eye.)

Was he gentle with you?

(BILLY can't look up.)

You know that's okay. What you did with him. If he treated you right.

BILLY

Why did he do it then?

MAN

They must have got to him. They see that sketch you made? Did you say something to someone? Maybe fat girl? Tell her about him or the daddies in the park?

(BILLY shakes his head.)

Did someone see something they shouldn't have? A look you gave him in the halls at school. Maybe he brought you here to teach you a lesson. Stop giving him the moon eyes because it didn't mean shit.

BILLY

It wasn't just me. It was him too. It meant something.

MAN

Something so big and powerful... The thing he was afraid of the most. That he had to kill. He tied you up... spread his jacket and put you down like it was before an altar.

BILLY

He's not like them.

MAN

99% of the world is made up of assholes and losers. All that bullshit you hear every day. About everyone being special. Yeah. They're special. They're assholes and losers in their own special way.

BILLY

He's a good guy.

MAN

You are the 1%, Christian.

BILLY

Billy.

MAN

Somehow. Against all the odds. Those sketches? Honor roll? Band? You got more in your little pinky... Those boys hiding behind the evergreens know it. And you being something they think they should be better than... drives them nuts.

Do they have to be that way? Fuck no. They could learn. If someone was there they could look up to. But who? Those scout leaders who let that shit go down?

We got a bunch of boys running around. Hell, they could be 40 years old and still be boys. Lost little dipshits. Because we've spent so much on everyone else. Making amends for centuries of shit... We've left them behind. Ignored what they need.

That's why when you nick them, peel back their skin and look at the layers inside... fear... rage... resentment... under so much pressure it's almost impossible to tamp down. Maybe not so much for gentle boys like you. But it's there. Like a pressure cooker full of nails. And if no one shows you a better way to release it... for something good, you go after the thing you fear the most. Alone you are worthless pile of shit, but you find a few buddies... pals just like you who have an axe to grind... All it takes is a push in the wrong direction... And that primal thing that is at the core of all those layers every man has inside. The thing that goes back to the first time the first man got hungry. The first time he stood on two feet to see over the long grass. The first time he was charged by a thing with sharper teeth than his own. The first time he saw something shiny in another man's hand. Something pure and beautiful that he didn't have. The first time he picked up a sharp stone and raised it over his head.

That thing comes out and it's more real than anything you feel under the sun. The scent of something wild. The cry of the wounded and vulnerable. And you are on the hunt. It only gets better when they try to run. The chase begins and you are off. Until you overtake it. Bring it down. Run your blade through its flesh. And the rest go in for the kill.

That thing you need to fight... to learn how to control... That's in every man. You saw that here tonight, Christian. In these woods. When they brought you down.

BILLY

I didn't see that in his eyes. When he tied my hands. When they came out from the woods.

MAN

What did you see?

BILLY

He was scared.

MAN

That's not what I saw.

BILLY

Fuck what you saw. You don't know what he's done for me. All your shit. Darkness, knives... where the fuck did you get all that stupid shit?

MAN

If he came up to you on Monday. At school. Took you aside and apologized...

BILLY

...He will.

MAN

And he'll mean it?

BILLY

He'll mean it.

MAN

You would forgive him?

BILLY

Yes.

MAN

After what he did to you here tonight.

BILLY

I would forgive him.

(Pause. MAN stares into BILLY's eyes. He smiles.)

Why are you staring at me like that?

MAN

Let's go.

BILLY

My phone.

MAN

We can come back tomorrow when it's light.

BILLY

We?

MAN

I'll give you a ride home.

BILLY

I'll walk.

MAN

I'll follow you on the road. Make sure you get home okay.

BILLY

No you won't.

MAN

Those boys. Know where they ran off to? Maybe they're afraid you may talk. They know where you live, right?

(Pause as BILLY considers.)

Get in the truck. You've done it before. Gotten into stranger's cars. Those men you met online. In the park.

BILLY

I'm not going to suck your dick.

MAN

If I had wanted that, I would have joined the boys tonight, now wouldn't I?

(Pause as BILLY considers.)

BILLY

You won't touch me?

MAN

I promise.

BILLY

Take me straight home?

MAN

Come on, son. You've had a tough night. Let me take you home.

(BILLY thinks for a moment. Then exits. MAN pauses for a moment to look around at the woods. He seems to be remembering something. It is a disturbing memory.

BILLY comes back on stage.)

BILLY

You coming?

MAN

Yeah. Yeah. I'm coming.

They exit.

Lights out.)

(Lights up.

BILLY and MAN sit in the front seat of a beat-up old pickup. A rusty old-fashioned mailbox is a short distance from them downstage left.

MAN eases down on brake. Car stops. MAN puts gear into park.)

BILLY

Why you stopping? The driveway's over there...

MAN

You can walk from here.

BILLY

You don't want to be seen with me. Big brave guy.

(MAN and BILLY hear a commotion coming from downstage left. It sounds like a woman and a few men having an agitated conversation. Quite loud. They sound like they are high and trying to have fun. Though the audience should be able to hear this, they should not be able to make out what is being said. BILLY sees the commotion. MAN follows BILLY's gaze.)

MAN

Someone's getting their Friday on.

BILLY

Shit.

MAN

Doesn't look like mother's been missing you too bad tonight, son.

(Loud laughter from offstage.)

Party. This happen often?

(BILLY is too embarrassed to answer.)

Who are the men?

BILLY

Her latest and his pals.

MAN

Not the kind you'd take home to meet grandma. Where'd she find him?

BILLY

Under a rock.

(MAN laughs. BILLY slinks down in his seat.)

MAN

What's up?

BILLY

They can see us.

MAN

They're already too wasted. This shitty old truck may as well be invisible. Doesn't look like booze. Or pot. She using?

(BILLY doesn't answer.)

Crack? Meth? Heroin?

(BILLY doesn't answer.)

How long will this go on?

BILLY

Till Sunday morning.

MAN

Then what?

BILLY

Mass.

MAN

Church? She can pull that off?

(BILLY nods.)

That's a talent. How long between parties?

BILLY

Not long enough.

MAN

Neighbors don't like it, I bet.

BILLY

It's not the best neighborhood.

(Sound of approaching car.)

MAN

Who's that driving up?

BILLY

They must have run out of stuff.

(Sound of car door closing. MAN laughs.)

MAN

He's a charmer. You mother have a regular job?

BILLY

She has problems with punctuality.

MAN

She like this in your old town?

BILLY

Not so much.

MAN

Your Gran wouldn't let this happen, I bet.

(BILLY gives MAN a suspicious look.)

Strong woman, your grandmother?

(BILLY nods.)

BILLY

She'd disappear for a few days. Then come back. Gran would make her go to church. They'd be there for hours.

MAN

When this happens, what do you do?

BILLY

Sneak in around the back. Hide in my room.

MAN

The scum she brings home try to get you to come along to the party?

(BILLY doesn't answer. MAN frowns.)

You have a place you can stay? Fat girl?

Her name is Rhonda, asshole. **BILLY**

Can you crash there tonight? **MAN**

She's out of town with her parents. **BILLY**

Anywhere else? **MAN**

(No response.)

No place? **BILLY**
I don't have a lot of friends. Okay?

(There is the sound of shattering glass. An agitated woman's voice is heard. Followed by a bunch of male voices laughing. The woman's agitation turns to laughter. More glass shattering. It becomes more raucous. BILLY starts to get agitated.)

Shit. **MAN**
Easy now.

BILLY
Shit!

MAN
Easy.

BILLY
Shit!

MAN
Come on, son.
(BILLY is having a panic attack.)

BILLY
Assholes!

MAN
Calm down.

BILLY
Fuck!

MAN

Easy now. You can do it. Like at Camp. On the lake.

BILLY

That night when the storm hit and Kyle and I... Under the canoe. When the lightning hit. I wasn't an okay guy. I wasn't brave and strong. I panicked. They found us. The next day. And took us back to camp. We didn't run and hide. I lied.

MAN

You're going to be okay.

BILLY

I cried all night. Like a baby.

MAN

You can stay with me tonight. I'll bring you back when things calm down.

BILLY

Great. This worked out just great for you, didn't it? Your lucky day. I tell you what. Why don't we just get things started.

MAN

...Billy...

BILLY

...Whip it out and I'll go down on you right now. Then you can take me back to your place, do me and take trophy shots. *Hey, guys, look at the twink I nailed tonight!*

MAN

Like I said...

BILLY

...If you're lucky I won't go to the cops and you won't end up back in the slammer...

MAN

...if that's what I wanted, I would have...

BILLY

...How do you want me? On my knees?

MAN

Knock it off.

BILLY

I'm tired of this shit. Look at this place. It's like she's running away from something.

MAN

Maybe she thinks she's protecting you.

BILLY

Why she have to be so fucked up?

MAN

Maybe this whole thing is her way of dealing with it.

BILLY

Are you nuts?

MAN

She has her reasons.

BILLY

What are they?

(MAN won't answer.)

Who the fuck are you? Why the fuck have you been following me? What the hell do you know about any of this?

MAN

What do I know?

(He decides to tell.)

That your real name is Christian. You were born in St. Joseph's hospital at 8:34 in the morning of February 3. You weighed 6 pounds 4 ounces. Your grandmother's name is Gertrude, people call her Gertie. You and your mother lived with your grandparents – the rooms above the garage in the back – at 234 Boyd Avenue. You attended Our Lady of Lourdes school. You moved out – probably in the middle of the night – sometime in August two years ago and no one has heard from you since.

CHRISTIAN

Who the fuck are you?

MAN

Your father.

I'm your father.

I've waited 15 years to say that.

I'm your father.

(CHRISTIAN exits the car. He runs a short distance away. MAN follows him.)

Christian.

CHRISTIAN

Don't come near me.

MAN

You have every reason to be upset.

CHRISTIAN

Stay away.

MAN

I didn't know how to... That's why I've been waiting... since I found you a last week... I've been trying to find a way, son.

CHRISTIAN

Don't call me that!

MAN

They wouldn't tell me where you were. I didn't even know if she kept you.

CHRISTIAN

You are not my father.

MAN

I wrote letters to you. Where the fuck was I supposed to send them?

CHRISTIAN

You're lying.

MAN

My parole hearings. Your grandmother showed up like clockwork to make sure I stayed exactly where I was... I'd ask about you and she'd tell me to rot in hell.

CHRISTIAN

Leave me alone.

MAN

But 12 years is 12 years and when it was over there was nothing she could do about it. Even if I had to stay 1,000 feet from you.

CHRISTIAN

You are not my father.

MAN

I am according to the DNA test.

CHRISTIAN

What did you do? Rob a bank? Beat the shit out of someone? Fuck! You were one of her dealers!

MAN

In some states, doesn't matter if you're only 18, you knock up a 15 year old, they put you away. Especially if the 15 year old has a bible-thumper for a mother.

CHRISTIAN

Fuck you.

MAN

One stupid mistake.

CHRISTIAN

Oh, is that what it was?

MAN

And I paid for it. With 12 years. And that should be it. Right? I did my time. Bullshit. I'm going to pay for it for the rest of my life. I'm on every fucking registry in every goddamned state in this union. You know how many neighborhoods I've been run out of? How many jobs I've lost?

CHRISTIAN

This is perfect.

MAN

What I did will stick with me till the day I die and there's nothing I can do about it.

CHRISTIAN

Hey everyone... my dad's a rapist!

MAN

Don't say that.

CHRISTIAN

Don't touch me, perv!

MAN

I had to find you and make it right. I figured it was the only way I would ever have a chance to make something out of my shit life. I got out, the first thing I did was come looking.

CHRISTIAN

Yeah. I was first on your list.

MAN

I get out and your mother grabbed you and took off and your Gran covered the tracks.

CHRISTIAN

How did you find us?

MAN

Those friends back home you're not supposed to talk to? Guess she forgot to tell you not to text.

CHRISTIAN

Muriel?

MAN

It took me a while, but eventually she told me...

CHRISTIAN

You hurt her?

MAN

I would never hurt...

CHRISTIAN

Never. Right.

MAN

I don't do that.

CHRISTIAN

Then why did they throw you away?

MAN

I made a mistake. If I could take it back, I would...

CHRISTIAN

If the stupid Catholic girl just hadn't gotten knocked up. I was the fucking problem.

MAN

You are not the problem.

CHRISTIAN

You are not my father. I don't even know your name!

MAN

Tom Norman. You're last name is Norman.

CHRISTIAN

The fuck it is!

(CHRISTIAN runs at TOM and begins to punch him frantically.)

TOM

Easy now...

CHRISTIAN

Your name is douchebag...

(CHRISTIAN continues to fight TOM. TOM deflects the punches easily.)

TOM

Christian...

CHRISTIAN

Go back to hell. No one wants you here.

(CHRISTIAN launches into a flurry of punches. TOM overpowers him by holding him tightly.)

Get your fucking hands off me....

TOM

Easy now.

CHRISTIAN

Don't touch me!

TOM

Easy.

CHRISTIAN

You're lying.

TOM

Calm down.

CHRISTIAN

Lies. All lies.

TOM

It's the truth. Son. The Truth.

(CHRISTIAN gradually gives up. They fall to their knees. TOM continues to hold CHRISTIAN tightly. CHRISTIAN is crying. Tears are in TOM's eyes.)

I've waited for 15 years... every hour of every day thinking about you... if you were walking... were you talking... how tall where you getting... what sports you played... the color of your eyes... If you were happy. I wanted you to be happy so bad. That if I had to suffer, it was so that you could be happy. That's the deal I made. I've been waiting for so long. And now I'm here. You are my last chance. Whatever I have to do, I'll do it. Nothing will ever harm you again. I promise. I've got you, son.

(CHRISTIAN has calmed down. TOM combs his fingers through CHRISTIAN'S hair.)

You okay?

(He nods. TOM looks off to where the noise was earlier.)

Looks like they brought the party inside. Let's get out of here.

CHRISTIAN

Where?

TOM

I got a place you can stay til things settle down.

CHRISTIAN

And then?

TOM

I haven't gotten that far. Whatever works best for you. Okay?

(CHRISTIAN nods.)

Get in the truck. I'll join you in a moment.

(CHRISTIAN is about to ask....)

Gotta take a piss.

(CHRISTIAN crosses to truck and gets into passenger seat. He looks toward the house – away from where TOM has crossed toward the rusty mailbox. TOM pretends to unzip fly. Instead of fishing himself out, he removes CHRISTIAN'S phone from his pocket. He takes a napkin out of his pocket and wipes the phone down. He holds the phone with the napkin. He pretends to shake and tuck himself back into his jeans. As he crosses to the truck, he casually places the phone into the open mailbox.

CHRISTIAN has not seen any of this.

TOM opens the door and sits in the driver's seat. He starts the truck up. Places it in gear.)

Let's go.

(Truck revs.

Black out.

End of Act I.)

Act 2

(Lights up.

Interior of truck. TOM drives. CHRISTIAN talks.)

CHRISTIAN

You've never heard of her?

TOM

No.

CHRISTIAN

You're kidding. Right?

(TOM doesn't answer.)

You've heard her songs. On the radio.

TOM

No.

CHRISTIAN

They're on all the time. I bet I could...

(CHRISTIAN tries to turn on the radio.)

TOM

Doesn't work.

CHRISTIAN

God this truck is a piece of shit. I'm surprised it runs.

TOM

So am I.

CHRISTIAN

You pay money for this?

TOM

No.

CHRISTIAN

It's hot?

TOM

Friend gave it to me.

CHRISTIAN

Some friend.

TOM

All it had to do was get me here.

(Pause.)

CHRISTIAN

You never heard of her. Not a single song?

TOM

What's so special about her?

CHRISTIAN

It's not *her*... well, it *is*, but it's more about what she *sings*.

TOM

Okay.

CHRISTIAN

She makes you feel... I can't explain it.

TOM

Try.

(TOM notices CHRISTIAN's florid gestures as he speaks.)

CHRISTIAN

It's like what you want to hear when you're really down. When she sings, it's like that voice you hear inside and you feel it and you own it like it's yours. When I think of myself as strong and fearless, it's her voice I hear.

TOM

You gotta find your own voice. (Pointing to CHRISTIAN'S chest:) It's inside there. Don't be afraid of it. Let it come out. Are you gay?

(CHRISTIAN gives him an incredulous look.)

Listen. You can fuck around with guys and old men in a park restroom and not be gay. Gay is a lot of other shit. Not just fun and games. You know - the whole thing. Are you gay?

(CHRISTIAN looks down.)

Go ahead. Say it.

CHRISTIAN

(With difficulty:) I'm gay.

TOM

Okay. First time you've ever said that? Out loud?

(CHRISTIAN looks down and nods.)

Good. Got that out of the way. Won't be so hard to say it now. Try it again.

CHRISTIAN

I'm gay.

TOM

Say it like a man.

CHRISTIAN

I'm GAY as shit!

TOM

Better. When you say it, don't cry or act all ashamed. Say it like it's no big deal and it won't be. Why the trolls? Do they pay you?

CHRISTIAN

I'm not a whore.

TOM

Why not boys your own age?

CHRISTIAN

They take care of me.

TOM

For an hour. Before they head back to their families. You don't have to blow them to get that.

CHRISTIAN

It's the only thing I have to give.

TOM

You have a lot more than that.

CHRISTIAN

How you know all this stuff? You someone's bitch in prison?

TOM

Watch your mouth. A buddy inside. He made no big deal of it and it wasn't. One more thing. You can be gay without all that fairy shit.

CHRISTIAN

You like making me feel bad about myself?

TOM

You're just not drawing on the right stuff. Kinda like that woman on the radio. You don't need her and you don't need all those gestures.

CHRISTIAN

What?

(TOM imitates CHRISTIAN.)

TOM

Why you do that?

CHRISTIAN

This?

(CHRISTIAN gestures with some ferocity.)

TOM

You don't have to do that.

CHRISTIAN

I'm expressing myself.

TOM

There are a lot of ways you can get your point across. Why you do it that way?

CHRISTIAN

Because it feels good.

TOM

Find something that feels better.

CHRISTIAN

If only you were here before I got into all my bad faggot habits.

TOM

All I'm saying is you gotta make more male friends. Ones your own age. They'll help you feel not so afraid of being a man.

(Pause.)

CHRISTIAN

What did you do to Muriel?

TOM

What do you mean?

CHRISTIAN

To make her tell you where I was?

TOM

I didn't make her do anything.

CHRISTIAN

You said...

TOM

She told me. Simple as that.

CHRISTIAN

(Imitating TOM's voice in an unflattering way:) *Hey, Muriel. I'm Chris's long lost daddy just sprung from the slammer. I want to see my kid. You know where his crack-whore mother's hiding him?*

(TOM laughs.)

TOM

I was working as a night janitor at the taco joint.

CHRISTIAN

She promised.

TOM

She didn't know what she was telling me.

CHRISTIAN

What did you do to her?

TOM

I listened. Jesus Christ, wind that girl up and...

CHRISTIAN

...She's a talker.

TOM

I listened. Mostly about how much she misses her best friend.

CHRISTIAN

How'd you find her?

TOM

Took me two years. At your old school. Online. Your neighbors. Nothing. Then clear out of the blue. I got lucky. One night while I was cleaning the Fryolator something wound her up. She's a good kid. Eats too many of those chalupas...

CHRISTIAN

She has a glandular problem she can't control.

TOM

You mean her mouth.

(They laugh.)

She's a good kid.

(Pause.)

So... What do you want me to call you? Billy? Christian? Or something else?

CHRISTIAN

Billy.

TOM

Why that one?

BILLY

One I got to choose for myself.

TOM

You can call me *Tom*. But maybe someday soon – when you get to know me better - you can call me something else.

BILLY

Role play, huh? You old guys all like that shit.

(TOM reaches into his shirt pocket and doesn't find something.)

TOM

Could you get me a stick of gum out of my coat pocket?

(BILLY reaches for the wadded-up jacket at his feat and rifles through the pockets. He pulls out the handgun.)

BILLY

What the fuck?

TOM

Easy now.

BILLY

Jesus Christ!

(He drops the gun on the floor of the truck.)

TOM

Pick it up.

BILLY

No fucking way.

TOM

Come on, Chrissie.

BILLY

Don't call me that!

TOM

Then pick up the gun.

(He won't.)

I got the clip in my pocket.

BILLY

What does that mean?

TOM

It's not loaded.

BILLY

Why do you have a gun?

TOM

You think I beat them off with just my fists tonight?

BILLY

You shot them?

TOM

We were there after dinner. See any bodies?

BILLY

What did you do?

TOM

If you hadn't run off after I popped pretty boy in the face, you'd know.

(BILLY waits.)

They didn't back down. I pulled the gun and they ran like little girls. Ever hold one before?

BILLY

No

TOM

Go ahead. Won't bite.

(BILLY tentatively picks up the gun.)

BILLY

Drawing those lines through the sugar must be a lot easier when you're packing heat.

TOM

Packing heat? Where you get that?

BILLY

TV.

(BILLY starts playing with the gun – pointing it, pretending to shoot, making gunshot sounds with his mouth, etc.)

Who am I? I'm danger boy. And I gotta gun. I gotta gun. Look at me, bitch. I gotta gun. Run, baby. Go ahead.

(BILLY holds the gun out in front of himself with both hands and tosses his head as though to fling long hair from his eyes.)

Freeze, motherfucker!

(TOM sees this and shakes his head.)

What?

TOM

That must have felt real good. You don't even know when you're doing it. Do you?

(This gets under BILLY's skin. He begins to caress and lick the barrel of the gun.)

BILLY

Oh, yeah. Yeah. Shoot for me, baby. Right in the face.

TOM

Knock it off.

BILLY

Isn't that what's it's all about? Some men have to pack heat and some men just pack.

TOM

What the hell is that supposed to mean?

BILLY

Now we know where you're packing.

TOM

Give it back.

(He hands to gun over.)

BILLY
You're not supposed to have that. Are you?

TOM
I'm not supposed to do a lot of things.

BILLY
Like what?

TOM
Get within 100 yards of you. Write to you. Talk to you.

BILLY
If you do?

TOM
One way ticket back inside.

BILLY
You need a kidney or something?
(TOM laughs.)

TOM
You didn't want to meet your dear old dad?

BILLY
Dream come true.

TOM
For me. It was. Last couple of years it was all I could think about. And when I got here and saw you. Trying to find it in all the wrong places. I knew there was a reason. They are not going to hurt you anymore. None of them.
(BILLY looks out the window and become concerned.)

BILLY
Where are we going? Town is back there.

TOM
You think I'd risk hanging out in that town?

BILLY
Where are you taking me?

TOM
My place.

BILLY
Stop this shit-bag truck and let me out.

TOM
It's just up the road. Relax.

(Silence as TOM drives on.)

BILLY

How long were you inside?

TOM

11 years, 271 days and 9 hours.

BILLY

For knocking up a 15 year old?

TOM

Paternity test had me by the balls. I was 18 so they tried me as an adult. Statutory rape. Your Gran made sure they threw the book at me.

BILLY

But if my mother said it wasn't...

TOM

Your gran got into her mind with all that Catholic shit. It didn't have to go down that way, but it did.

BILLY

She should have gotten rid of me right away.

TOM

No.

BILLY

Save all the hassle.

TOM

I just wish it hadn't happened the way it did.

BILLY

12 years? That makes you... 31... 32?

TOM

About that.

BILLY

You don't look it.

TOM

Younger?

BILLY

Older. A lot.

TOM

Living in a sardine can will do that to you.

(TOM turns the wheel. Then slows the car down to a stop.)

Here we are.

BILLY

You're fucking kidding me.

(Lights out.)

(Lights up.

Interior of motel room. Two beds. Torn window shades. Stained bedside lamp. Miss-matched bedspreads. Duffle bag with clothes and books spilling out lies on floor.

TOM enters followed by BILLY. TOM turns on the light. BILLY crosses into the room and looks around.)

BILLY

(As Betty Davis:) What... a dump.

(Tom is confused.)

Bette Davis?

TOM

You just can't help it, can you?

BILLY

What?

(TOM laughs.)

TOM

It's not so bad.

BILLY

I know this place. It is.

TOM

Your daddies take you here?

BILLY

Shut up.

(TOM waits.)

We lived here till we found our place.

TOM

This room?

BILLY

Second floor. Overlooking the train tracks.

TOM

You can hear it from here too.

BILLY

Like it's driving through the bed.

TOM

2:30 in the morning. Can set your watch by it.

BILLY

You get used to it. No TV?

TOM

Cheaper without it and the phone.

(Tom sits on bed. Billy sits on the other one.

Pause as neither know what to say or do next.

Tom crosses to ice bucket and crosses out the door.

Billy crosses to the duffle bag and looks at the books. They are science textbooks. He opens one and it is full of scientific explanations and equations. He picks up another and thumbs through it.

Tom returns with full ice bucket. He places it on dresser and goes to the bathroom.)

BILLY

You read these?

TOM'S VOICE

Yep.

BILLY

For fun?

TOM'S VOICE

For school.

BILLY

You're in school?

TOM'S VOICE

College.

BILLY

Around here?

(Tom returns carrying a wet washcloth.)

TOM

Online.

BILLY

(Sarcastic:) That's impressive.

TOM

Only ones who would take me.

(He crosses to the ice bucket and removes some ice cubes and wraps them in the wet cloth.)

When I was a kid... I got a full-ride. Engineering. They decided not to hold it till I got out.

(He kneels beside BILLY on the floor and holds the ice-wrapped cloth to his face. BILLY flinches, but TOM holds him steady.)

Take it.

(BILLY holds the cloth in place.)

Full ride. Not bad, huh?

BILLY

(Looking through a book:) Thermodynamics. You understand this stuff?

TOM

You gotta take it little pieces at a time. It's science. Gotta make sense. Right?

BILLY

You can get an engineering degree online?

TOM

No. But if I get these courses under my belt. A few at a time. When I can afford them. I can show the real schools I'm serious.

(He removes the cloth to look at the black eye. Then he puts it back.)

Hot and cold. Without what happens when something goes from hot to cold and back, nothing works. No engines, machines, even weather. Hell it can't even rain. And this? Slows everything down so it doesn't swell so much. These figures and equations... that is the language you need to master it.

BILLY

Totally online.

TOM

Yep.

BILLY

No classes.

TOM

Nope.

BILLY

No assholes poking you in the back, pushing you into your locker, asking for your notes so they can cheat.

TOM

A few instructors who are pricks, but you deal.

BILLY

All this just sitting in front of your computer?

TOM

Saving up for one. In the meantime, I find a library with one I can use. Till they run my name and kick me out. Then it's a new branch... new town.

(BILLY examines the second book.)

BILLY

Looks hard.

TOM

You ever play pool? Then you know it and you don't even know it. Pretend your cue is this force. Harder you hit, the faster and further it goes. Cause, effect. Simple as that.

(BILLY pulls out a sheet of paper folded into the book.)

Got an A on that one. Library in town let me print it out. Bet you've seen plenty of those. Smart boy like you.

(BILLY smiles.)

Maybe you could help me study sometime. Do our homework together. I work nights down at the plant. So I have time in the evenings... when you get done with school... after band practice... track... debate... all the things you do. Think you'd like that?

(A drop of water falls from the icepack and drops onto the test.)

What the...? You're going to get...

(The red A gets blurred.)

Shit.

(TOM grabs the test from him. He is getting mad.)

Fuck.

BILLY

Sorry. Okay. I'm sorry!

(TOM looks at BILLY who is upset. He realizes he has lost control for a second and he's ashamed.)

TOM

It's okay. Hey. Nothing to worry about. (Laughing:) What was I going to do, frame it? Won't be the last one. Right?

(He takes the icepack and crosses to where some plastic cups are wrapped in plastic. He rips the plastic off a cup and wraps it around the wet washcloth.)

My fault. No worries.

(He crosses back to BILLY.)

Let me see.

(He holds BILLY's chin.)

Look at that black eye. Beauty. Something to be proud of.

(He places the plastic-wrapped pack on the side of BILLY's face. He holds it there. BILLY holds TOM's hand.)

I'll be damned.

BILLY

What?

TOM

Looks like you got stuck with the Norman nose. Spitting image of my granddaddy. Where you got your brains too.

(TOM laughs. Then musses up BILLY's hair. BILLY wrinkles his nose, but appears to like it.)

BILLY

I'm not as smart as you think. I work hard. Because I have to. To get out of this town. And who gives a shit?

TOM

I know that feeling.

BILLY

It sucks.

TOM

First couple of months it was all about beating myself up for being such a dumb ass. For doing that to her. You start out as a jock with a good GPA and three schools that accept you under early submission. You're the golden statue on top of the wrestling trophy you won junior year. But that disappears and you eat yourself alive with regret

until there is nothing left. You start turning into what everyone thinks you are. Prosecutors... witnesses... You get thrown into a tiger pit, how do you survive? Turn into a tiger. And that's what I was for a few years. No better than what they all thought I was. Till I saw the light.

BILLY

You find God or something?

TOM

My bunkmate. The one I was telling you about. You know...

(He gestures effeminately.)

BILLY

Knock it off.

TOM

You wouldn't believe the shit they would say to him... and he'd turn it around... (Rough voice:) *Hey, cuddles, why don't you come here and suck my dick!* (Sassy voice:) *I wouldn't put my lips to that useless uncooked piece of Vienna wiener, if I were drowning and your balls were pumped full of air.* It was like poetry. And if they came back at him, he was there with the capper. You wouldn't take a pop at him because you knew if it started, it would be to the death. He took a shine to me.

(BILLY looks at TOM with a raised eyebrow.)

Nah... it wasn't like that. He'd bring me books from the library and make me read them. Then we'd talk and it would be like the world in the books come alive right there in the 12 x 12 foot cell. Close your eyes and you'd be right there. By the time he got out I could do it by myself.

BILLY

Maybe we could visit him.

TOM

For a lot of guys serving time is easy. It's getting out that's hard. He left me the truck. I found the gun in the glove box. Only friend I had left.

BILLY

Your mom... dad?

TOM

Some people start off not knowing their parents. Others lose them along the way.

BILLY

They die?

TOM

Forgiveness can be a difficult thing.

BILLY

What was she like?

TOM

Who?

(TOM gets it.)

Your Mom?

BILLY

Back when you knew her.

TOM

Pretty.... Not show-off pretty. Like the hair and makeup and the clothes. She was just beautiful the way she was.

(TOM pulls a photo out of his wallet. It is worn. He hands it to BILLY who has never seen the photo before.)

BILLY

Long time ago.

TOM

I took it out by the lake near the school. Girl like her, you go full steam ahead, she'll run. So I went easy. God she had a pretty smile. You can see it. She still smile like that?

(BILLY is too mesmerized by the photo to respond.)

I was a senior. She was a freshman. But when we talked it wasn't like that. You couldn't help but whisper. I'd come over after school. You'd think I was a rabid dog the way your Gran acted. I even went to church. Just to see her.

In the cafeteria I'd place my tray next to hers. First time I did that, shoulda seen her blush. I knew right away. Go slow. Pay no attention to my buddies. They tried to get into my head, like your scouts getting into your boyfriend's head. Because they see something beautiful that they can't have and that brings it out. But no matter what jackass thing they said or did, I knew I had to go slow.

(TOM takes the photo back from BILLY.)

If I could make her smile like that again. Walk up to her. (To the photo:) *I'm sorry. It was my fault. And I've paid for it. With everything they could throw at me.* And if I said it right, she'd know that it was true. And she'd see the 18-year-old boy she fell in love with. And all those bad years would be erased and we could go back and I'd be gentle... just hold her hand... and we'd whisper and she'd smile again. Like the way she smiled for me when I took this picture. And I'd fix everything I had ruined. That's why I came back.

BILLY

To fix it.

TOM

I fixed it tonight, didn't I? Back there in the woods? I can fix this too.

BILLY

How?

TOM

Well...

BILLY

You don't know. Do you?

TOM

Things have kinda taken a turn I wasn't expecting. I was still checking things out when your boy scouts decided to play rough tonight.

BILLY

Great.

TOM

I took a huge risk saving your ass. I'll have to take you back tomorrow. But you can't tell anyone I'm hanging around. You got that?

BILLY

No.

TOM

We gotta wait till you're 18 before I can see her again. I blow it, she'll take off with you sure as shit.

BILLY

Three years?

TOM

I can be like a regular dad. The ones who don't get custody. Work their asses off to keep their ex in the house and only see their kids two weekends a month. Only I won't be making any mortgage payments. Hell, I haven't been able to keep a job more than six weeks... janitor, roadwork, parking crew... doesn't matter. They run a check, I'm out on my ass. We could do it that way. On the down low. You sneak out when you can. Call when something gets fucked up like tonight. Only you can't tell anyone. You do and I'm back inside. For good this time. What do you think?

BILLY

You're going to hide in this Podunk town and I'm going to put up with shit for three more years?

TOM

Can't risk it.

BILLY

She'd forgive you.

TOM

How do you know that?

BILLY

You just have to mean it. From your heart.

TOM

I do.

BILLY

Did you love her?

(TOM nods.)

Did she love you?

(TOM nods.)

You sorry about going too fast?

(TOM nods.)

You got to tell her.

(TOM thinks about it.)

TOM

It's been a long time. I haven't had anyone close like that... Not since her.

BILLY

We'll practice. Like it's a play or something.

TOM

You're going to teach me to act.

BILLY

If you saw her again, what would you say?

(TOM gets down on his knees.)

TOM

(Unconvincing:) Forgive me! I beg you!

BILLY

That sucks.

TOM

What the fuck.

BILLY

It has to be real.

TOM

It is.

BILLY

We'll work on it.

TOM

You'd do that for me?

(BILLY nods. TOM chuckles.)

Might take a few months.

BILLY

You just got to mean it. I'll help you with the other stuff.

TOM

Flowers? Chocolate? That sort of thing?

BILLY

No. She's got to see it's from (pointing to his chest:) here.

TOM

You'll know when I'm ready?

(BILLY nods his head. TOM smiles.)

We can start practicing tomorrow.

(BILLY nods.)

Getting kind of late. (Gesturing to the bathroom:) You can use ... if you need... the stuff in there...

BILLY

I'm okay.

TOM

Better than beneath a canoe. Right?

BILLY

Barely.

TOM

I'm gonna... Why don't you turn in? Big day tomorrow.

(TOM exits into bathroom. He closes the door most of the way. We hear water running. Then the sound of TOM brushing his teeth.

BILLY looks awkwardly around the room. He sees some clothes in a heap on the floor. He picks them up, folds them and puts them in the rickety dresser.

The water turns off. We hear TOM urinate into the toilet.

BILLY picks up TOM's jacket from where it is draped over the chair at the desk. He crosses to a rack, screwed into one of the walls, and hangs it up. He sees the outline of the gun in the pocket. He takes the gun out and stares at it. He reaches into the pocket with his other hand and removes the bullet clip.

BILLY hears the toilet flush.

He quickly puts the gun and clip back into the jacket pocket.

Water runs again and TOM washes hands and face.

BILLY crosses to the center of room. TOM re-enters.

They look at each other for a beat. Not knowing what to do.)

TOM

(Pointing to the closest bed:) I'll take this one.

(BILLY shrugs.

TOM takes off his shirt and throws it to the desk. He takes off his pants. Wearing only his boxers, he climbs into the bed. He reaches over and turns on the lamp that sits on the stand between the beds. He plugs his flip phone into the power source.

BILLY has tried to not stare as TOM has taken off his clothes and gotten in bed. But he can't help himself.)

Get the light?

(BILLY crosses to the switch by the door and turns it off.

He crosses back to the bed TOM is not using. He faces away from TOM and takes off his shirt. He is embarrassed by his body. He tries to fold the shirt, but it takes too long, so he rolls it into a ball and drops it on the floor. He quickly takes off his pants and gets under the covers of his bed as quickly as he can. He pulls the bedspread up to his shoulders.

TOM leans back and sighs deeply.

Beat of silence.)

BILLY

Those books you read... in prison... That worked?

TOM

Close your eyes. You'd be there.

BILLY

From a book?

TOM

Jail cell can make you pretty desperate.

BILLY

Where'd you go?

TOM

Anywhere the book lead. Japan. London. Tasmania. And not just now but from long ago too. Once or twice even the future. Those were a trip. Hated reading before I got in. Funny how that works.

BILLY

What's your favorite place?

TOM

I don't know.

BILLY

The one that was best when you closed your eyes?

TOM

Alaska. Whole book of stories about what it was like... during the Gold Rush. Sled dogs and Eskimos and mining camps. Biggest mountain in North America.

BILLY

You been there for real?

TOM

I've been nowhere.

BILLY

Think it's pretty?

TOM

In a wild way.

BILLY

I'd like to go.

TOM

You would?

BILLY

Maybe we could go together?

TOM

(Laughing:) You and me. Alaska?

BILLY

Once we get everything settled here. Prove to her that you're sorry. That you're a good guy. Might take a while, but I'll work on her. I'll tell her how you helped me tonight. Maybe with you around, she'll realize she doesn't have to be afraid anymore. Maybe you could chase the assholes away... so she can get straight again. You can come over for dinner and after we can all watch TV and I'll go to my room and study so you can sit in the living room and whisper. Like you used to. I know she wants that. She just doesn't know how to get it. You'll get a better job down at the plant and trade your piece of shit truck for a nice new car that we'll drive to church every Sunday.

TOM

Cheer you on at your track meets. Come see you debate. They let parents do that?

BILLY

If they want to be bored to death.

TOM

Your band concerts.

BILLY

And the guys at school will see me with you. And they will know that I'm a cool guy. Because I have a dad like you. And then, next summer. When I'm off school. We'll get into that new car. Just you and me. We'll get out of this butthole town and we'll drive. North. And west.

TOM

Through Whitehorse and the Yukon.

BILLY

We'll keep going.

TOM

Over the Richardson and on up to Fairbanks.

(BILLY closes his eyes to see it.)

BILLY

And it will be just you and me.

(TOM closes his eyes too.)

TOM

And nature. Everywhere you look. None of the shit that ties you down here. No courthouses, no registry... no assholes trying to get you to do the things you know are wrong.

BILLY

A place where you are not afraid to show who you are inside.

TOM

A place where you can start over.

BILLY

Montevideo.

TOM

Montevideo?

BILLY

That's in South America. Right?

TOM

Beats the hell out of me. Why there?

BILLY

It's fun to say. *Montevideo*.

TOM

Good a reason as any.

BILLY

We could go anywhere. Outer Mongolia. You know they drink reindeer milk there. They even turn it into cheese. I like cheese. We can hitch a ride on a cargo boat bound for Africa and follow Stanley and Livingston all the way to Timbuktu. We'll ride camels deep into the Sahara like Lawrence of Arabia... Deep into the heart of nothing. Just sun and sand... So quiet. Except for the wind. And at night... A night so deep and dark you can't see anything – not even your hand right in front of your face - until you look up... into the night sky. And there they will be... Every single star in the Milky Way. The same stars that were there back in the time of the cavemen. We'll see the same stars they saw then. When they first started making up their stories. To bide the time between night and day. And we will look up and we will be small. Insignificant. Nothing. But it won't be scary. Because we will be a part of something. Huge. Enormous. A part of everything. Everything that you can see and what you can't. Nature. The way it's supposed to be. We will look up into the night sky. Just me and you. And we will be brave and strong and free.

(He looks over to TOM.)

What do you think?

(TOM has fallen asleep.)

Goodnight. Dad.

(BILLY turns the lamp off.

Lights out.)

(Lights up.

Middle of the night. Ambient moonlight and blinking neon hotel sign through the hotel room curtains.

Both are sleeping. BILLY has crawled into TOM's bed and is sleeping with his head on TOM's chest.

Sound of freight train passing very close to back wall of hotel. Room rattles. TOM wakes up. He is shocked to find the sleeping BILLY snuggled up against him in the bed. He decides not to wake BILLY.

The sound of the train fades.

TOM puts his hand on BILLY's head and smooths his hair gently. He looks down at him. Smiles. He kisses the boy's forehead. Then leans back and closes his eyes. He falls asleep with his son in his arms.

Lights out.)

(Lights up.

Morning. Sun shines in through the blinds on the window.

TOM is asleep in the bed. On his side.

BILLY is dressed and sits on the desk chair a short distance away. He holds an art pencil and his sketch book. He is sketching a close up of TOM as he sleeps. He seems to be inspired, because the sketch is one of the best he has ever done. He draws quickly. He smiles as he sketches.

TOM slowly wakes up. As he wakes, BILLY closes the sketchbook. He crosses to the bed and sits down. TOM rolls over and sits on the side of the bed.)

TOM

Haven't slept that good in a long time. How about you?

(BILLY nods his head.

TOM reaches out and tousles BILLY's hair. BILLY likes that. So does TOM.)

Like eggs? Waffles? Pancakes?

BILLY

Yeah.

TOM

Let's check out the café across the road before we head back to see if the party has wound down. Okay?

BILLY

We don't have to.

TOM

What?

BILLY

Go there.

TOM

The diner?

BILLY

The house.

TOM

Uhhh...

BILLY

Like you said last night.

TOM

We said a lot of things last night.

BILLY

I meant everything I said.

TOM

So did I.

BILLY

So we don't have to go back. It can be just you and me for a while.

(This brings TOM up short.)

TOM

You'd like that? Say *Fuck it!* Take off and hit the open road?

(BILLY nods his head.)

What about your mom?

BILLY

She won't care.

She will.

TOM

She won't miss me.

BILLY

You're all she's got.

TOM

I can send postcards so she won't worry.

BILLY

Just take off.

TOM

Like you said last night.

BILLY

Jesus!

TOM

(TOM laughs.)

BILLY

I could get my GED anywhere.

TOM

You are quite the something. You know that?

BILLY

Any place would be better than this shit hole.

TOM

One thing I know, you don't tie things up, shitholes have a way following you wherever you go. Give me a few and we'll head across the road have a coffee, some bacon, a few eggs sunny side up. Then we'll talk real talk. None of this crazy-assed stuff.

(BILLY looks disappointed.)

Come on now. You gotta teach me how to say what I need to say first. Remember?

(TOM crosses into the bathroom. He turns the shower on.

He opens the dresser drawer and sees the clothes. He laughs.)

You're going to make someone a nice little wife.

BILLY

You're a pig.

TOM

Maybe now, but I can learn.

BILLY

So can a pig.

(TOM makes a loud and realistic pig squeal sound. This surprises BILLY. He chases BILLY around the room grunting, snorting and squealing like a pig. BILLY laughs as he tries not to be caught.

TOM catches BILLY, picks him up and throws him to the bed.

He stands back and holds his arms up in victory.)

TOM

King of the swine!

(BILLY laughs. TOM realizes he must look a little ridiculous. He laughs and grabs a pair of pants and shirt and exits into the bathroom. He closes the door. We hear the curtain part as he enters the shower.)

(Singing:) *Down in the West Texas town of El Paso, I fell in love with a beautiful girl. Nighttime would find me in Rosa's Cantina, music would play and my girl she would whirl...*

(Through the following part of the scene, TOM continues to sing the tune – *El Paso* by Marty Robbins. For most of it he has forgotten the words and just sings notes or improvises. BILLY thinks it's funny.

During the song, BILLY crosses to the sketchbook and examines the drawing he has made of TOM. He likes it.

He puts the sketchpad back in his book bag. He paces around the room. He goes to the window, opens the blinds and looks out. He turns around and sees TOM's flip phone on the nightstand between the beds.

He walks to the phone. He looks out the window. He looks at the phone.

He picks up the phone and disconnects it from its power source. He walks to the window with the phone in his hand. He turns and looks at the bathroom door.

TOM is still singing the song.

He smiles. He decides.

He turns to the window, flips the phone open and dials a number.

He waits.)

BILLY

They gone? It's me. Your son! Jesus, Mom. ... Because I'm not *using* my phone. A friend's. Are they gone? ... Which ones? ... Shit. ... I'll say *shit* when I

want to say *shit*. ... I did, but your party was taking off so I did too.... A friend's place. ... Tom. ... Yeah, you know him. ... No. He's older. He helped me last night. I could have been... hurt real bad. But he helped me, so I'm fine. ... I don't want to talk about it. ... Why would you care? ... Didn't look like it last night. ... Not until they're gone. ... No. ... No. ... NO. ... (Pause. He decides:) Why didn't you tell me about him? ... My dad. ... No, that's bullshit. He didn't just take off... Because he told me. ... TOM. ... My dad. I'm with him now. I could have been hurt really bad last night and he came and helped me. And he drove me home and was going to drop me off... ... I'm not going to tell you. I just called to say that I'm fine and I'm not coming home. You got your druggies there so you don't need me. ... I'm not telling you. ... Oh, you're going to call the police. Yeah, they'll stop by and take your statement. With your *dealer* in the next room. That's funny, mom. Do you even listen to yourself? I'm not coming home. You need to be on your own for a while. Give you time to figure your shit out. ... You, Gran, prison, everything. He's been trying to apologize to you for 15 years, but Gran wouldn't let him. He came to find us to make it all better. My dad found me. And he saved me. Okay? I was in trouble and he saved me. ... You know what? That's stupid. You know another rock we can hide under? (Repeating what he knows:) You got pregnant, he was 18, you were too young, so they threw the book at him. ... Why do you have to overreact to everything? It was a long time ago. You gotta get over it, Mom. ... Don't cry. ... You were right to like him. I do too. He wants to help us. He just doesn't know how yet. ... Mom? ... Jesus.... Just knock it off. I know the whole story.

(Long pause. During the pause, as BILLY listens, he becomes very still.)

How many? ... Where? ...

(We can still hear TOM singing in the shower. BILLY slowly turns to look at the bathroom door.)

No... That's not... He didn't... That wasn't him. ... He said he loved you. That you loved him. ... You whispered. ... It was those other guys. They put him up to it.

(As he listens, he collapses to his knees and wipes the tears from his eyes. He looks at the bathroom door. He covers his free ear with his hand so he can't hear TOM sing. Every word he hears through the phone is like a blow. This is extremely distressing.)

He's not like that. I don't believe you. Why should I? You've lied to me my entire life.

(He looks at the bathroom door.)

I'm not going to tell you. ... Because you'll ruin it. Like you ruin everything. ... Go back to your druggies and take another hit and forget I even called. Forget I ever existed, okay? Isn't that what you've always wanted? Now's your chance.

(He flips the phone shut.

He's in shock. He wanders over to the sketch pad and looks at the drawing. He looks at the bathroom door.

The phone rings. He looks down at the number. He clicks the ignore button.

He begins to pace around the room.

Phone rings again. He looks down at the number. His eyes get big. He doesn't know if he should answer it or not. He decides and clicks the ignore button.

He slowly starts to panic.

He puts his pants on. Then his shirt.

The panic builds.

We hear the shower turn off and the curtain slide open.

BILLY places the phone on the bed and walks to the coat rack. He removes the gun from TOM's jacket pocket. He takes the clip out and tries to insert it into the handle.

It won't fit.

His hands are shaking.

He tries it again.

And again.

It finally slides into place.

He puts the gun in his back pocket and picks the phone up off the bed. He crosses to the middle of the room, stares at the bathroom door and waits.

The door opens and TOM exits, clean showered and wearing the shirt and pants he brought into the shower with him. He is in a good mood.)

TOM

Ready?

(TOM sees BILLY's bare feet.)

Better put on some shoes if we're going to grab some chow. I'll even buy you a chocolate shake.

(TOM sits on the bed and puts his socks on. He sees BILLY just standing there.)

You still thinking about us taking off?

(TOM puts his shoes on.)

I know it's fun to think about, but we can't let our imaginations get outa hand.

(TOM looks up at BILLY and gives a "what's up?" gesture.)

BILLY

Did you lie to me?

TOM

We gotta figure things out here first, then we can talk about maybe taking a trip or two.

BILLY

Did you lie to me?

(TOM looks at BILLY. Time stops for a beat.)

Did you rape her?

TOM

(Carefully:) Yes. I raped her. I did time. Like I said.

BILLY

Not like you said.

TOM

Everything I told you was the truth.

BILLY

Your buddies? The four other guys?

TOM

Where did you...?

BILLY

... They held her down...

TOM

... get that from...?

BILLY

... While you got on top of her...

TOM

... How did you...?

BILLY

... and raped her!

(TOM sees the phone in BILLY's hand.)

TOM lunges for the phone. He pries it out of his hands. He flips it open and looks at the call history.

TOM

She called it in. Fuck!

(Tom throws the phone against the wall. Much of it shatters. He grabs the main piece and slams it down on the nightstand over and over.)

Shit! Fuck! Fuck! I'm fucked!

(He sits on the bed.)

Why'd you do that?

(He is devastated.)

BILLY

You lied to me!

TOM

I didn't lie. I just left some white spaces and you filled them in wrong.

BILLY

Fuck you!

(TOM jumps to his feet and opens the dresser and starts throwing his clothes onto the bed. Over the next lines of dialogue he tries to shove the books and clothing into the bag.)

TOM

Gotta get the hell out of here...

BILLY

...You and your buddies...

TOM

...Did you tell her where we are...?

BILLY

... You raped her....

TOM

...Doesn't matter, they'll track it in a few seconds...

BILLY

... And left her there...

TOM

...Five minutes they'll be here...

BILLY

...In the woods...

TOM

...It wasn't supposed to happen that way. I *loved* her. I would never hurt her...

BILLY

...She walked all the way home...

TOM

...They couldn't stand what we had...

BILLY

...in her bare feet...

TOM

...We didn't know they were following...

BILLY

...She was bleeding...

TOM

...They jumped us...

BILLY

...The cops picked up you and your boys...

TOM

...They grabbed her before we could run...

BILLY

...at a basketball game...

TOM

...They got into my head...

BILLY

...But you were the one who passed the test...

TOM

...(Imitating the other boys:) *Look, guys. She's wet for him. You got her wet, Tommy boy. Congratulations....*

BILLY

...You aced it...

TOM

...*The Virgin Mary!*

BILLY

...And she's such a Jesus freak...

...Stop being such a pussy...

TOM

...she didn't have it scraped out...

BILLY

...She's ready for you...

TOM

...and flushed down a toilet ...

BILLY

...Seal the deal, limp dick. It's time to lose your cherry....

TOM

...The stupid catholic girl kept it...

BILLY

.... If you don't, one of us will....

TOM

...She kept me...

BILLY

...One of us real men....

TOM

...and now every time she looks at me, she sees you and she remembers that night...

BILLY

...Let's flip for it, boys....

TOM

*...And you come here and you want me to call you *daddy*...?*

BILLY

*... I tried from the second I was on top of her. I whispered it over and over, *I love you*. *I'm sorry. Forgive me*. And they kept egging it on, saying they'd finish it off if I couldn't. You know what happened, Billy. You heard it last night.*

TOM

It's not the same.

BILLY

Ask pretty boy. That night I was just as scared as him. No one wants to believe that after thousands of years that animal is still inside. You saw it. It came out last night... same as it came out 15 years ago. I couldn't stop it then. But I know how to draw the line now. Why can't anyone believe me?

(TOM is getting ready to leave. He stands up and throws the duffel over his shoulder.)

BILLY

Where are you going?

TOM

Far away as fast as I can.

(BILLY pulls the gun out from behind his back and points it at TOM.)

BILLY

No.

(TOM laughs and begins to walk toward the door.)

TOM

Baby, come on. That's cute but... Give me the gun.

(BILLY fires a shot through the desk just in front of TOM. This surprises TOM. He begins to walk forward again, but BILLY fires another shot just missing TOM's leg.)

BILLY

I'm drawing the line this time. It's right here.

TOM

You're serious. Okay. Maybe you don't know this, but... If you don't let me out of here, in about two minutes, the cops will come through that door with their guns drawn and they won't be asking any questions. They'll see a pistol... In your hand or mine, makes no difference. It won't matter that I did my time... that I tried to stay my 100 yards away... that I saved your ass from those snot-nosed little bitches... that I'm sorry for what I did. That I'll never do it again. None of that will make a shit load of difference. If by some miracle they don't cut me down right here in this room, they will drag me out that door and throw me back inside... this time for good. And everything I've worked my ass off for. Everything I tried to make right again. Will be ripped away from me.

BILLY

I don't care.

TOM

You do. Billy. Son. I've been watching you for weeks. I know you. You aren't like the rest. You are better than them. In every way. That's why you won't hurt me.

(TOM slowly crosses to BILLY.)

I'll come back. I'll keep my distance this time, but I'll come back and I'll watch and make sure no one hurts you again. I'll be just like a good father. Is it a deal?

(BILLY shakes his head.)

Okay. I get it. You don't trust me. Real curve I threw you. Will take you a little while to process. But in the meantime, give me the gun and I'll take off and...

BILLY

No.

TOM

I gotta run, little guy. Give me the gun.

BILLY

No.

TOM

Give me the gun.

(TOM dives for the gun wrestles BILLY to the floor. They struggle over the gun. TOM manages to wrest it away from BILLY, he falls back on the floor. On his knees, he tries to gather his things up.

A siren is heard. It is approaching.

TOM stops and looks at BILLY. Tears are forming in his eyes.)

Shit.

(Other sirens join in and grow louder.

Pause.

TOM realized that there is no escape.)

I guess this is it.

(TOM laughs.)

I could have taken off... been all the way to the other side of the world right now. But I didn't. Because I had to make sure she was okay. That you... my son... were fine. I was hoping I'd be able to get to know you better. You get to know me. The real me. Not the shit you're going to hear.

(TOM becomes more emotional as he speaks.)

I just wanted to see her. The beautiful girl that will always be in my mind. Say I was sorry. Make it up to her. Somehow. But then I saw what I had done to her. I am every reason for why she is the way she is now, Billy. That is my fault. How the fuck am I going to fix that?

But you. Not you, Billy. I see you and I see... She made the right choice. Because you, son... you are so smart... and so talented... so beautiful. And I'm so proud of you. We almost pulled it off. Didn't we? Came that close. I woulda walked down the

street, my arm around your shoulder. *This is my son.* I have a son. My boy. My little man...

(He tries to embrace BILLY, but he pulls back.

Sound of police cars entering the parking lot. Sirens are turned off.
Flashing lights can be seen through the drapes.

TOM starts to panic.

We hear car doors open and slam and police radio with perhaps the dispatcher saying, "Amber alert: All units Starlight motel." During the rest of the scene we hear the dispatcher calling more units and relaying information.

TOM looks at the gun. He starts to tremble.)

I'm not going back.

(TOM starts to panic.

We hear pounding on a door a few motel units away.)

VOICE OF POLICEMAN

Police. Open the door, please.

TOM

I'm not going back.

(We hear the door open.)

VOICE OF POLICEMAN

(Barely heard:) We have an Amber alert. A fifteen-year-old boy. About five foot four. Seen anyone like that?

MAN'S VOICE

No.

TOM

My last line.

VOICE OF POLICEMAN

Mind if we search the room?

TOM

Right here.

(We hear pounding on a door a unit to the other side of the room. We hear door open.)

VOICE OF POLICEMAN

Mind if we come in for a second, ma'am?

TOM

Looks like I've drawn myself right into a corner, doesn't it?

(We hear more pounding on a door that is closer to TOM's room.

TOM is breathing heavily. His adrenalin is racing. He points the gun at his own chest.)

They should never have locked me up. Should just have shot me through the heart.

(He can't pull the trigger. This freaks BILLY out. He lunges for the gun.)

BILLY

No!

(TOM holds the gun still as BILLY tries to pull it away.)

TOM

Here's your chance, Billy. Eye for an eye. Tooth for a tooth. That's how justice works. I took her life away, you take mine.

BILLY

Stop it!

TOM

I'm too much of a fucking coward. But not you, Billy. You are a brave boy. Put me out of my misery!

BILLY

No!

(Loud pounding knock at the door. TOM and BILLY freeze.)

VOICE OF POLICEMAN

It's the police.

(More loud pounding.)

Tom Norman? You in there?

TOM

What do you want?

VOICE OF POLICEMAN

Open the door.

TOM

Stand back.

VOICE OF POLICEMAN

(To a colleague:) Get the master key. (Back to the door:) William Brennan, are you in there?

BILLY

I'm okay.

TOM

I got a gun.

VOICE OF POLICEMAN

He's got a gun! Fall back!

BILLY

Why did you...?

VOICE OF POLICEMAN

Behind the cruisers! All units! Fall back!

TOM

I'm not going back.

BILLY

Put the gun down. Please. They won't understand and they'll hurt you.

VOICE OF POLICEMAN (THROUGH BULLHORN)

Put the gun down and come out with your hands raised.

TOM

This is it for me, Billy.

BILLY

No.

TOM

I go out there, you know what will happen?

BILLY

Give me the gun and you'll be fine.

TOM

You know that's not true.

BILLY

I'll tell them that you saved me.

TOM

Doesn't matter.

BILLY

You may have to go away for a little while.

(TOM laughs.)

I'll come and see you. I promise.

TOM

They won't let you.

BILLY

They'll have to. You're my dad. I'll send you stories... about what I'm doing... what I see... where I go... and you will be able to go there with me. All you have to do is close your eyes.

TOM

You'd do that?

(BILLY nods.)

VOICE OF POLICEMAN (THROUGH BULLHORN)

If you don't come out, we'll have to come in.

BILLY

You just have to do something first. Okay? Kneel.

(TOM kneels.)

You gotta tell me the truth.

TOM

I promise.

BILLY

Are you sorry for what you did? To my mother. To me.

TOM

Yes.

BILLY

Do you ask for forgiveness?

TOM

Yes.

BILLY

Say it.

TOM

Forgive me. Please.

BILLY

Do you promise to make up for your sins?

TOM

Every day for the rest of my life. But whatever I do... I know it will never be good enough to make up for...

BILLY

It doesn't have to. You just have to mean it.

TOM

And you would forgive me?

BILLY

I will try.

TOM

You will?

(BILLY nods.)

BILLY

I'll tell them about how you helped me. How you saved my life. And how you were gentle and kind to me. That's got to count for something. Right?

TOM

Sure.

BILLY

I'll tell everyone that you are a good guy. That you will be a good father. That you will try to love your son with all your heart.

TOM

I do, son. I do.

BILLY

Even though he is a loser.

TOM

You are perfect. Just the way you are, little man.

(TOM hugs BILLY. BILLY returns the hug.)

TOM pulls back. He kisses BILLY on the forehead. BILLY hugs him.)

I have a son.

(BILLY hugs him again. TOM has to pull him off.)

Let me go first.

(TOM hands the gun to BILLY.)

Cover me.

(BILLY's eyes get big.)

Kidding, kid. See you on the other side.

(TOM crosses to the door.)

(Yelling through the door:) I'm unarmed and I'm coming out.

(TOM opens the door and puts his hands above his head. He takes two steps out of the door, when it appears that he has been tackled and wrestled roughly to the ground. There is a loud commotion from outside as TOM struggles and the police repeatedly punch and kick him.)

BILLY

Stop kicking him! He's a good guy! Stop! He's sorry! I have a gun! I'll use it if you don't stop! I'll use it!

TOM

Billy! No!

(BILLY fires the gun into the ceiling.)

VOICE OF POLICEMAN (THROUGH BULLHORN)

Fall back! Hold your fire! Positions behind the cruisers. Hold your fire!

TOM

(His voice trailing as he is pulled off:) Put the gun down, Billy! Put it down.

VOICE OF POLICEMAN (THROUGH BULLHORN)

Come out with your hands up!

(BILLY begins to panic.

He looks at the gun. He looks around the room.

None of it makes sense to him. He is frightened and has nowhere to go.
He collapses to his knees and starts to hyperventilate.

He closes his eyes. We can see he is concentrating on something. He is seeing something.)

BILLY

Brave. And strong. And free.

(He opens his eyes.

He places the pistol on the floor. He stands and calmly walks to the door.

He pauses for a moment.)

He inhales and looks forward.)

Brave. And strong. And free.

(He walks out the door.

Black out.

End of play.)