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“An evil old house, the kind that some people call haunted, is like an undiscovered country waiting to be explored.”

—opening voiceover, *The Haunting*

## **Cast of Characters**

RHODA, late forties

GWEN, her sister, mid forties

FINN, Gwen's son, twenty

CARVER, the man down the street, late forties

## **Notes**

The play takes place on a single day in the Rockford house: on the ground floor and in the cellar-level fallout shelter. There is a small door in the floor that leads down to the shelter. (In the production at Berkeley Rep, the stairs up to the unseen second floor doubled as the stairs down to the fallout shelter in Part Two.)

In Part One, the playing space becomes smaller with each scene. Although the characters don't notice, the distance to a window, or a door, or to one another will become distinctly shorter—a kind of slow strangulation of the stage. This is a visible event that precedes each scene. The space should shrink enough that we find it strange that the characters don't notice. Part Two takes place in the tiniest space of all. At the top of Part Two in the Berkeley production, set designer David Korins lowered the ceiling of the house so that it was just above the actors' heads. While every theater's budget may not permit a moving ceiling, I think that some kind of design gesture is helpful to mark the end of Part One and the beginning of Part Two.

The furniture in the house has already been removed, the paintings stripped from the walls. Perhaps we can see the footprint of these things in the carpet, the places where the paint hasn't faded. The one remnant of the house in its glory days is a tall grandfather clock which tolls the hours as indicated. The time should be projected as words at the top of each scene—in this play, it is very important to know what time it is.

## **Also**

A slash mark indicates overlapping speech, with gratitude to Caryl Churchill.

## Acknowledgments

*Finn in the Underworld* was written with the support of the Jerome Foundation and the Djerassi Resident Artist Program, and was further developed in The Playwrights' Center's PlayLabs and at Seattle Repertory Theatre. It received its world premiere at Berkeley Repertory Theatre (Tony Taccone, Artistic Director; Susan Medak, Managing Director) on October 6, 2005. The cast and staff were as follows:

GWEN.....	Lorri Holt
RHODA .....	Randy Danson
FINN .....	Clifton Guterman
CARVER.....	Reed Birney
Director.....	Les Waters
Scenic Designer.....	David Korins
Costume Designer.....	Annie Smart
Lighting Designer .....	Matt Frey
Sound Designer .....	Darron L West
Stage Manager .....	Kevin Johnson
Dramaturg.....	Scott Horstein
Casting.....	Amy Potozkin, Janet Foster

With special thanks to Les Waters, Polly K. Carl, and the directors, actors, and dramaturgs who helped develop the play in workshops at The Playwrights' Center's PlayLabs and Seattle Rep's HotType Festival.

All production groups performing this play are required to include the following credits on the title page of every program:

*Finn in the Underworld* had its world premiere at Berkeley Repertory Theatre (Tony Taccone, Artistic Director; Susan Medak, Managing Director).

# FINN IN THE UNDERWORLD

by Jordan Harrison

Part One.

**11 am on the grandfather clock.**

*(The ground floor of an evil old house. Late morning light. The clock chimes eleven.)*

*(GWEN has just arrived. She stands in the front door with a suitcase on wheels and a carry-on. RHODA is sorting through heaps of old belongings: china, tchotchkes, records, clothing, photographs. Cardboard boxes everywhere. RHODA continues with her work.)*

**GWEN.** Rhoda.

**RHODA.** Gwen.

**GWEN.** I see there's a lot of work.

**RHODA.** Oh.

**GWEN.** Not to say you haven't been making headway not to say you're not, just—  
They had a lot of things.

**RHODA.** Are you back on coffee?

**GWEN.** Boxes, good. And I could go / to the

**RHODA.** Your hair.

**GWEN.** grocery store for more.

**RHODA.** There's some more grey.

**GWEN.** I went off the L'Oreal. Felt like it was working its way into my synapses, you know, deep.

**RHODA.** *(Off Gwen's gesture:)* Fizzing.

**GWEN.** Toxic, I imagine.

*(Pause. RHODA still sorting things.)*

**GWEN.** Have you talked to Mom?

**RHODA.** I call Mom every morning.

**GWEN.** She's all moved in?

**RHODA.** Mm-hmm.

**GWEN.** How is the, how are the—does she like it all right?

**RHODA.** Well it isn't the Taj Mahal, but it's...dignified. She seemed relieved to have just two rooms to fill. Little golf carts to whisk you around.

**GWEN.** I thought you said dignified.

**RHODA.** They have *three* cooks. Do you know she wasn't even cooking anymore? Frozen-microwave everything. She'd only ever cooked for someone else, so when Dad—. I don't think she even knew what she wanted to eat without asking him first.

**GWEN.** I suppose that's the virtue of being a single woman—you don't get used to defining yourself by someone else.

**RHODA.** That sounds...unpersuasive.

**GWEN.** I admire your independence, Rhoda, I really do.

*(Pause.)*

How do the rooms look?

**RHODA.** The guest bedrooms are closed down, and the den.

**GWEN.** Good, and

**RHODA.** The attic.

**GWEN.** Good.

*(Short pause.)*

**RHODA.** But not... / the shelter.

**GWEN.** The shelter.

*(Pause.)*

**RHODA.** I waited for you.

**GWEN.** You're afraid?

**RHODA.** “Hesitant.”

**GWEN.** Afraid you’re going to see something.

**RHODA.** You’re the one with the talent.

**GWEN.** They’ve been very quiet, my ghosts.

**RHODA.** Biding their time.

**GWEN.** (*Ignoring her:*) I don’t like *taking* things, I don’t even like pain-killers but Dr. Landecker has been giving me something truly wonderful. Little blue miracle pills once a day is all.

**RHODA.** Pills for ghosts.

**GWEN.** Freedox, for clarity. Of purpose.  
I know you think it sounds like urban indulgence / but it’s—

**RHODA.** Sounds *quack*, maybe.

**GWEN.** It’s been good, Rhoda, really good.

**RHODA.** (*In the manner of an imaginary infomercial:*) “Until Freedox came along, I didn’t know how much life there was to live.”

**GWEN.** Like that, yes.

*(Pause.)*

Finn will be here in a couple hours. Is there—in the fridge?

**RHODA.** Sandwiches.

*(Pause. Something changes in RHODA—she gets up to give GWEN a hug.)*

**RHODA.** Hi.

**GWEN.** Hi.

**7:02 pm on the grandfather clock.**

*(The playing space has grown smaller.)*

*(CARVER, 48, is just outside the front door. He stares up at the house, waiting. He is wearing a necktie.)*

**FINN.** *(Off:)* I left my suitcase in the car.

*(FINN, 20, runs on. He has a red baseball cap in his back pocket.)*

**FINN.** *(Surprised to see that CARVER's right there:)* Hey.

**CARVER.** Hey.

**FINN.** You, what, waited?

**CARVER.** I thought there might be something to wait for.

*(Pause.)*

Are you having fun in there?

**FINN.** Right. The two of them like these wild things battling for scraps of flesh and me just standing there dodging the—what are they called, mines—the *minefield* really of passive aggression.

*(Pause.)*

And what, are your parents still, I mean still / around?

**CARVER.** No.

**FINN.** Lucky, oh sorry I mean / I just

**CARVER.** Yes.

**FINN.** You know.

**CARVER.** Lucky.

*(Pause.)*

You're kind of a foxy guy, Flynn.

**FINN.** "Thanks."

**CARVER.** I like you, Flynn.

**FINN.** *Finn.*

**CARVER.** Oh sorry. Finn.

*(Pause.)*

**FINN.** Where can we go? I mean there's this stupid dinner thing first, but after.

I mean isn't that what we're doing?

You want to go fuck?

**CARVER.** You don't have to talk any kind of talk.

**FINN.** *(Humbled:)* Okay.

**CARVER.** Euphemisms can be fun too.

**FINN.** Where can we go *together*.

**CARVER.** The tree swing?

**GWEN.** *(From off:)* Finn, ten minutes!

*(FINN touching CARVER around the waist.)*

**FINN.** No I mean really...disappear. *(Shouting to GWEN:)* Okay!

**CARVER.** Have you been down in the fallout shelter?

**FINN.** You know this house.

**CARVER.** Your Aunt and I, way back in aught-six.

*(A fake laugh from FINN.)*

Playing house with the hardtack and the emergency cots. Playing doctor.

**FINN.** *(A real laugh:)* Rhoda, gross.

**CARVER.** Hide and seek. There were good places for not getting found.

**FINN.** Aunt Rhoda said *it's not a place people go any more*, and—you could almost hear the violins shrieking in the background almost. "It's not a place people *go*." Which probably means she's hiding the really good jewelry there or something.

**CARVER.** *(Confirming:)* It's not a place people go.

*(FINN holding onto CARVER's belt loops. Pause.)*

**FINN.** You believe in ghosts?

**CARVER.** The restless kind, maybe.

**FINN.** Huh.

**CARVER.** Not a kind you can see—white sheets...

**FINN.** “Boo.”

**CARVER.** No, the kind that worm their way into your dreams so you can’t separate them from yourself. So you can’t remember where you end and they begin. That kind can be scary.

*(Pause.)*

**FINN.** You’re kind of a funny guy, Carver.

**CARVER.** “Thanks.”

*(CARVER strokes FINN’s arm, his shoulder. Hint of a smirk—this is going well.)*

**FINN.** I’ll be right back.

*(FINN starts to go—CARVER catches him by the sleeve.)*

**CARVER.** Where are you going?

**FINN.** I have to tell them *something*.

**CARVER.** Right.

**FINN.** Wait, first. I want you to give me a mark, here.

Put your mouth on me, here. *(Indicating his neck. CARVER leans in.)*

No wait. *(Indicating his hip.)* Here.

**1:32 pm on the grandfather clock.**

*(RHODA and GWEN, sorting through the belongings. They mean to do this quickly and efficiently, but are continually derailed, drawn in by the objects and their histories. Cardboard boxes all around them, and crumpled newspaper, for packing. GWEN is holding up a winter coat with a rather flamboyant fur collar. Monkey fur?)*

**GWEN.** Mom brought it from Milan—so keen for us to pass for a European family. And her the matriarch. I think she actually *wore* it once—to that grisly sort of cotillion? At the Rotary? Or maybe the opera.

**RHODA.** Funny to see you this nervous.

**GWEN.** I'm not.

*(Pause.)*

He likes good restaurants. Finn. I was thinking drive into town tonight? We could get those little nime chow?

**RHODA.** “Nime...”

**GWEN.** Those little rolls—shrimp in the center, and not fried? Chinese? Vietnamese.

**RHODA.** That hasn't made it out to Missouri. Sometimes I drive to the mall and there's a place with sushi—sometimes I do that. But most everywhere it's still bake sales and Betty Crocker. *(With a weary exhalation:)* Missouri.

**GWEN.** I don't know why you're still there. Phillip thinks you've got the Stockholm Syndrome.

**RHODA.** Phillip is always *thinking* things.

**GWEN.** Rhoda

**RHODA.** Not everyone can afford the Northwest!

**GWEN.** The rents are down. How many times have we told you how beautiful the mountains and the water, the crime rate, but you...soldier on in the Show-Me State.

**RHODA.** It's home there.

**GWEN.** *(Muttered:)* Home is where you hang your...

*(She trails off. They fall into silence, resuming their work. Suddenly RHODA's face lights up—she holds a metal drink mixer aloft.)*

**RHODA.** We could make martinis!

We could make martinis like  
when we talked about making  
martinis and running away to  
Tripoli  
just 'cause we liked the name  
and wearing cigarette pants to go  
with our cigarettes.

**GWEN.** *(Simultaneously:)*  
Tripoli!

**GWEN.** *I* talked about running away. You would never have been able to leave the pet turtles, your mild-mannered boyfriend.

**RHODA.** Carver wasn't always mild-mannered.

**GWEN.** You would never have been able to abandon your place on the Dean's list.

**RHODA.** That isn't how I remember.

**GWEN.** I guess that's not the sort of thing a person chooses to remember about themselves.

*(Pause.)*

**GWEN.** *(In another voice:)* "Ten Reasons I Go To Church, by Rhoda Rockford." *(Back to normal, but still performing a bit:)* Rosy-cheeked and alliterative: who could resist? Up in front of the whole school in that curious dress, that *garment* Mom picked with the lace—and I had to tell everyone you had been kidnapped and reprogrammed by a group of wild-eyed sectarians. This at least garnered some sympathy, I remember.

**RHODA.** Okay, what's going on.

**GWEN.** What?

**RHODA.** You're...vibrating with hostility.

**GWEN.** I'm a little nervous.

**RHODA.** *(Lightly:)* Your own son.

**GWEN.** He just— (*Backpedaling:*) And don't be dramatic, Rhoda. He just is...full of surprises.

**RHODA.** The expulsion you mean.

**GWEN.** Well, yes

**RHODA.** "Surprise!"

**GWEN.** He loves to find new ways to scandalize his parents and I like to be...prepared.

**RHODA.** Well he's very inventive.

*(Short pause.)*

You really think it was about you?

**GWEN.** What.

**RHODA.** I imagine it must be hard, when you're just getting to know yourself. And you meet someone in a position of authority... He didn't have someone his own age?

**GWEN.** I don't think this is a good subject.

**RHODA.** If my son did something like that, I'd try and figure out why.

**GWEN.** You don't *have* a son.

*(RHODA suddenly appears busy.)*

**GWEN.** It's a good sign, I think. I mean him taking an interest, this weekend. Willing to help out. Don't you think?

**RHODA.** Oh this.

**GWEN.** What.

*(RHODA starts to dust off a picture frame.)*

**RHODA.** Dad's Ansel Adams.

They gave it to him for retirement. (*Smitten:*) Autographed.

**GWEN.** Oh you like that too?

*(Both sisters examining the photograph now, GWEN over RHODA's shoulder. RHODA making it hard for her to see.)*

**RHODA.** I always went into Dad's study when there was nowhere else, and when I squinted I became that speck there by the grove of trees. I would...visit that place, I remember. In Dad's study.

**GWEN.** It's a nice one.

**RHODA.** *(Suddenly and forcefully:)* You're not going to have it.

**GWEN.** Rhoda.

**RHODA.** You with Nana's tea service and all the jewelry.

**GWEN.** Costume / jewelry.

**RHODA.** Garnet, pearls.

**GWEN.** I'm the photographer.

**RHODA.** *Armchair* photographer!

**GWEN.** I take *pictures*, and to me this isn't a place to *visit*, it's a masterpiece.

**RHODA.** You'd sell it?

**GWEN.** I would *appreciate* it, / I would

**RHODA.** You wouldn't and you won't.

**GWEN.** Okay. What do you want? We can settle this—King Solomon-like, we can—get some scissors in here, and whoever can't bear to see it...

**RHODA.** You would give in.

*(GWEN gets up to open a window. Her back to us, looking outside.)*

*(Pause.)*

**RHODA.** What if I let you have the clock?

*(GWEN turns back to her.)*

**GWEN.** *(Not rejecting the idea:)* I wouldn't know where to put it...

*(Beginning at the asterisk in the following, the ticking of the clock starts to grow distinctly louder. GWEN hears this but RHODA does not.)*

**RHODA.** I had the appraiser come see it. He was amazed \* it's still keeping track, all these years.

**GWEN.** 19th-century, right?

**RHODA.** The insides are all in order, if we just had the varnish worked on.

**GWEN.** (*Quietly; feeling the strange phrase in her mouth:*) "The insides are all in order."

*(The ticking grows louder and louder. Around the asterisk in the following, it has grown so loud that RHODA's words are completely unintelligible, but she carries on with the scene as though nothing is out of the ordinary. GWEN starts to be visibly affected by the sound.)*

**RHODA.** Nice old man who went to school with Dad. Apparently he's been having quite \* a boom in business. Antique Road Show and whatnot. Everyone's discovered they're sitting on a gold mine. The demise of the sentimental heirloom, I'm afraid. Are you all right, Gwen?

**GWEN.** STOP.

*(The ticking returns to normal, all of a sudden.)*

**RHODA.** (*Going to her:*) Gwen? What's inside that poor head?

**GWEN.** It was

**RHODA.** One of your

**GWEN.** All in my head?

*(Short pause.)*

**RHODA.** Are you back?

**GWEN.** I'm back.

*(GWEN takes one of her pills.)*

**RHODA.** Where did you go?

**GWEN.** (*Laughing, on "Loud," at the word's inability to describe the experience:*) It was... Loud.

And suddenly I was afraid for someone.

*(GWEN looks at the clock, ticking innocently now.)*

**GWEN.** He said he'd be here by 2.

*(Short pause.)*

**RHODA.** It was Finn?

**7:51 pm on the grandfather clock.**

(FINN and CARVER have just entered the fallout shelter. It is quite dark.)

**FINN.** More space down here than you'd think.

**CARVER.** It was the deluxe edition. Slow down!

**FINN.** Such a scaredy! You sound like them.

**CARVER.** Hold on, I can barely see you.

(FINN turns on the light.)

**FINN.** "Boo."

(He kisses CARVER. They kiss like it's something they've been waiting a while to do.)

**CARVER.** (*Intimately:*) Hey.

**FINN.** Hey.

**CARVER.** Soon as I saw you standing there I wanted you, with that hat and that kind of "I'm-up-to-no-good"—but I didn't know, I never would have *expected*.

**FINN.** I mean, about fucking *time*. All day surrounded by old food processors and ancestral Civil War uniforms. And flannel sheets with fucking...mallards (*CARVER laughs.*) on them. So yeah. This is good. I needed to remind myself I was still—you know—*alive*, even. Dust and must and maiden aunts. Old old old old.

**CARVER.** (*Reminding FINN that he's old too:*) Old.

**FINN.** Oh sorry, I mean old souls. I don't mean old people that actually have *sex*.

You know, I've never done this kind of thing.

**CARVER.** You mean

**FINN.** I mean I like people my own age.

**CARVER.** (*Unconvinced:*) Oh.

**FINN.** Have you, ever, with someone young enough to be your / grandson?

**CARVER.** Son. *(A scoff.)* Hardly!  
I'm forty-one.

**FINN.** Hmm.

**CARVER.** Okay forty-eight.

**FINN.** Forty-one year old butt.

**CARVER.** *(Embarrassed:)* Gym, thanks. How old are you?

**FINN.** Twenty-five.

**CARVER.** Hmm.

**FINN.** Okay twenty-three.

**CARVER.** *(Looking around:)* Look at those cobwebs, wild.

**FINN.** Okay twenty.

**CARVER.** *(Turning back:)* Jesus.

**FINN.** *(Playfully:)* Don't look at me that way.

**CARVER.** What way / don't

**FINN.** Don't pretend you don't know what way.

**CARVER.** Like I want to commit a crime?

*(CARVER looks That Way. FINN breaks the eye contact first.)*

**CARVER.** So you like to be looked at.

**FINN.** Well, no one ever does.

**CARVER.** Why not, a handsome little sociopath like you?

**FINN.** At least kiss me when you say that.

*(Some horseplay.)*

**CARVER.** *(Re: horseplay:)* Ow.

**FINN.** *(“You pansy-man”:)* “Ow?”

**CARVER.** Here, let's—my coat...

*(They get more comfortable. CARVER puts down his coat for them to lie on.)*

*(They take each other in.)*

**FINN.** It wasn't easy—I mean, the third degree.

**CARVER.** What'd you tell them?

**FINN.** "I'm going to stay and do some reading."

**CARVER.** So we've got...

**FINN.** Two hours?

**CARVER.** Alone.

**FINN.** All alone with the *(He smiles—a quick, private laugh.)*

**CARVER.** What

**FINN.** Neighborhood perv

**CARVER.** You think I'm

**FINN.** Old Spice and good manners, it's a sure sign

**CARVER.** You're a strange boy.

**FINN.** Hostage inside my own house!

**CARVER.** Thought I was *your* hostage.

**FINN.** Are you sure?

**CARVER.** *(Suddenly serious:)* This place is strange, Finn. I know how this place makes people...not themselves. This house is strange with secret strange corners and stairways to nothing your aunt showed me as kids. The portrait with a safe behind it. We—my family—didn't have money like that but I was glad we didn't have enough *room* in our house for ghosts. Little red house, the blight of the neighborhood. But your house—

**FINN.** My *grandparents'*—

**CARVER.** Your *family's* house is another story. The German Shepherd buried in the front yard, and on the front door that brass knocker shaped like a set of long fingers. Tiny little door to the shelter, like for people that aren't the right size. I used to have nightmares: that black opening in the middle of the floor like a mouth. People don't look at this house when they're passing.

**FINN.** You talk like we're rich, but he built it, himself, my grandfather—back when there were barely any other houses.

**CARVER.** The red house was there.

**FINN.** He brought all the lumber up that hill. To start a family with a view of the city, far away but *there*, like something to conquer someday. To conquer a city with nothing but his salesman briefcase and a talent for capitalizing on people's fears. My mom likes to tell me that story: "Industry, Finn!"

**CARVER.** I haven't been completely truthful with you.

*(A silence.)*

**FINN.** Do you have a disease?

**CARVER.** I'm not a neighbor. I mean, not a just-stopping-by neighbor.

I've known your family for a long time and my brother knew your family and.

**FINN.** If you aren't sick I don't need to know.

**CARVER.** I've lived in this town since I was born and.

*(FINN starts to touch CARVER, playfully, trying to lighten things.)*

**FINN.** So tortured! I can tell you have a nice cock—it's the shy, tortured ones.

**CARVER.** Listen. I've lived here since—

**FINN.** The *Catholics*. Time to see that big confessional cock.

**CARVER.** I don't like when you talk like a porn star.

**FINN.** Why?

**CARVER.** It's...not true.

**FINN.** How am I supposed to talk?

*(FINN puts on the red baseball cap.)*

Like a street urchin? "Help Mister, I lost my parents in the department store."

**CARVER.** Stop it.

**FINN.** “Please Mister, will you raise me now? Teach me my please and thank-yous?”

**CARVER.** *(Not sure he wants him to stop:)* Stop.

**FINN.** *(À la Oliver:)* “Please, Sir, I want some more—”

*(CARVER kisses him to stop the game. Kissing and more kissing. FINN is now astride CARVER, the two of them facing each other.)*

**CARVER.** *(Very quietly:)* Oh. Can I just hold myself there It feels so good to hold myself there, I wouldn’t go inside you.

**FINN.** What if you did?

**CARVER.** *(To himself, regarding the sensation:)* Beautiful.

**FINN.** *(Very quietly, still:)* What if you did whenever you wanted?

*(Pause. FINN is rocking now, slightly, rhythmically.)*

What if you branded me, with your initials, here?

*(Pause. CARVER’s breathing.)*

What if you fed me on nothing but your cum?

*(CARVER’s breathing.)*

What if you led me to your office on a leash to blow your boss?  
What if

**CARVER.** oh.

**FINN.** What

**CARVER.** Sorry

**FINN.** What?

**CARVER.** *(He came:)* I’m sorry.

*(Pause.)*

**FINN.** Has anyone ever told you you’re kind of vanilla?

*(The grandfather clock chimes— Like something familiar and forgotten— It seems to break the spell, to draw FINN back to the world.)*

### 3 pm on the grandfather clock.

*(The clock finishes tolling 3 pm. FINN has just arrived at the house. He is looking through the nostalgia piles, rather more aimlessly than the sisters. He has a great awareness of the space between him and other bodies in the room, a self-consciousness about the fit of his clothes. RHODA and GWEN are busy, but they still indulge FINN with attention—it's unusual to have him around. FINN holds a table lamp. He is not wearing the red cap yet.)*

**FINN.** This one I could almost use, sort of a.

**RHODA.** Tell me.

**FINN.** Conversation piece?

**RHODA.** *(A small warning:)* It's an Eames.

**FINN.** Score.

**GWEN.** *(To FINN:)* Do you have enough Tupperware?

**RHODA.** There's *never* enough Tupperware.

**GWEN.** Hush, Betty.

**RHODA.** Betty?

**GWEN.** Crocker.

**FINN.** I don't see myself needing that. Family sort of stuff.

**RHODA.** You don't see yourself...?

**FINN.** Cooking, really.

**GWEN.** He's moving around a lot, these days.

**FINN.** *(Mocking her euphemism:)* I move around a lot.

**GWEN.** Always trying on a new city.

**FINN.** *(To RHODA:)* I'm interested in their texture.

What does the air smell like? Sawdust?

Are the homeless visible? The insane?

**RHODA.** Huh.

**FINN.** Do people look each other in the eye when they pass?

Are the streets a grid or a tangle?

**RHODA.** Are you sharing these adventures with someone?

**FINN.** Mom.

**RHODA.** (*To GWEN:*) What.

**FINN.** People are always talking without precision. “Someone.” I mean right now? I mean we’re talking about I won’t need Tupperware because that’s not what *happens* to people like me.

**RHODA.** (*“You’re being imprecise too”:*) People like you.

**FINN.** I won’t have a gift registry, I won’t have monogrammed / towels.

**GWEN.** ‘Course you will.

**FINN.** I won’t be needing Gramma’s, whatever, Waterford crystal, because I’ll be living on coffee / three meals a day.

**GWEN.** You talk around it too. We give you the chance, Finn, we give you—

*(She is not looking at him.)*

The door is open.

*(Pause.)*

**RHODA.** Have you thought about where you want to eat?

**FINN.** I don’t know this place.

**RHODA.** The “texture?”

**GWEN.** (*To rescue FINN:*) Make sure you look through the paintings.

**FINN.** Where?

**GWEN.** Over there, that box by the stairs.

*(FINN starts rifling through. He picks up the Ansel Adams photograph.)*

*(GWEN and RHODA take notice—holding their breath, almost.)*

**FINN.** Adams. How museum gift shop.

*(He lays it aside, unceremoniously.)*

**RHODA.** (*Pointing to another box:*) We haven't opened that one yet—like a time capsule. I bet you find some treasures.

**FINN.** (*To GWEN:*) She talks like I'm seven or—

**RHODA.** (*Briskly, looking him in the eye:*) Yes.

**GWEN.** Phillip is talking about retiring.

**RHODA.** Mm.

**FINN.** (*For opening the box:*) Where are the scissors.

**GWEN.** The commute has been so taxing.

**FINN.** The scissors.

**RHODA.** (*To FINN:*) By your foot.

**FINN.** oh.

**GWEN.** We've always wanted to see Africa, Thailand...

**RHODA.** An adventure.

**GWEN.** ...Halifax.

**RHODA.** Tripoli?

**GWEN.** Not *that* much of an adventure.

**FINN.** *This* is nice.

*(FINN has opened the box. He holds up an unframed watercolor painting.)*

**FINN.** This sort of art naïf.

**GWEN.** Mom took that painting class in when was it?

**RHODA.** Around when she got bored with life.

**FINN.** (*Captivated:*) Snow.

Sort of a Grandma Moses thing going on.

**GWEN.** She was pretty good.

**FINN.** I *like* this.

*(He continues to look through the box.)*

**GWEN.** Finn used to do watercolors.

**RHODA.** Oh?

**FINN.** In like fourth grade.

**GWEN.** He used to *do* things. He was good at everything.

**FINN.** I'm right here.

**GWEN.** *(Still to RHODA:)* I used to look forward to the parent / teacher conferences—they would gather round like I was some sort of parenting *resource*. What did I eat during my first trimester? What kind of music did he hear in the womb?

**FINN.** Vintage.

*(FINN has found the red baseball cap—RHODA and GWEN freeze as he puts it on.)*

**RHODA.** Don't wear that.

**FINN.** What.

**GWEN.** Take it *off*.

*(Puzzled, he does. A silence.)*

**FINN.** The painting? Not Gramma...

*(He picks it up again and points to a corner.)*

“Will Bishop, Grade Six.”

**GWEN.** *(Under her breath:)* Oh Dad.

**FINN.** Who is Will Bishop?

*(GWEN and RHODA do not look at each other.)*

Say something.

*(Pause.)*

**RHODA.** Your grandfather had a young friend. *(GWEN looks at RHODA, surprised at her disclosure.)* Always wanted a son and—two daughters and neither of us anywhere near a tomboy. *(Rapidly now.)* And he had a young friend down the street a bright boy with a fa-

ther who wasn't there. And what happened was one day this neighbor boy was found dead here in this house dead.

**GWEN.** I was still very young.

**RHODA.** You were probably?—

**GWEN.** He was thirteen.

**RHODA.** God.

**GWEN.** I was eleven.

**RHODA.** And Carver got it into his head that your grandfather had something to do with it.

**FINN.** Carver?

**GWEN.** Rhoda's friend

**RHODA.** Will's brother got this idea in his head and wouldn't let go even after the hearings and wouldn't let *us* let go. There.

**FINN.** (*A question:*) "Something to do with it."

**RHODA.** Not *killed* of course, but gave him the *means*, is what they were saying. That your grandfather gave him the...education.

*(GWEN takes her little blue pills out and swallows one. FINN notices this.)*

**FINN.** The education?

**RHODA.** Self-induced, they ruled.

**FINN.** I don't understand.

**RHODA.** Remember this is the early '60s—I mean people didn't talk, still didn't talk about things like masturbation even, let alone...asphyxiation.

And you can imagine what it did to his business—someone who went door to door selling people safety. All of a sudden, the room for keeping your family safe was the scariest place in the house.

*(Pause.)*

**FINN.** Where did they find him?

*(GWEN looks down, toward the door to the shelter. Ever so slightly, down. Perhaps she takes a step towards it.)*

**RHODA.** Gwen found him.

**9 pm on the grandfather clock.**

*(Down in the fallout shelter. The clock is chiming—it sounds very far away down here. FINN is wearing the hat.)*

**CARVER.** I remember everything, Finn.

Here was where Rhoda hid her candy bars, under the loose floorboard. No childhood is complete without a loose floorboard. And how we made up grand names for the cockroaches. Tallulah, Sterling, and the twins, Samson and Delilah. The survivors, we said. We told them stories so they could tell the future about us. One time, we hid down here all day, smoking her father's good cigars.

**FINN.** Before it was not a place people go.

**CARVER.** Smoking ourselves blue and...exploring.

**FINN.** *(Teasing:)* So this must be a real flashback.

**CARVER.** This was our place. But then he started coming here.

**FINN.** Who?

**CARVER.** Her father, your grandfather.  
Liked to come here.

*(Pause.)*

**FINN.** Did he come here with Will?

**CARVER.** How did you know?

**FINN.** That's usually why people fall silent around here.

*(Pause.)*

**CARVER.** One time, we were supposed to be watching your mother? Rhoda and I? But instead we put her in front of Ed Sullivan and went out to neck at the tree swing. And she came down here looking for us. She was used to finding us here...but not that night.

*(Short pause.)*

**FINN.** Did people really think a basement would keep them safe?

**CARVER.** Cuba. People were scared so—I guess it felt good to do something. Concrete, lead paint.

**FINN.** Spam, Saltines.

**CARVER.** People were scared so—we did what we could.

*(Short pause.)*

**CARVER.** It's probably what put you through college

**FINN.** You mean

**CARVER.** Your grandfather and his Fear. Places like this put you through college.

**FINN.** I haven't been "through" college.

**CARVER.** Right, twenty. What are you, a sophomore?

**FINN.** Forever.

**CARVER.** What?

**FINN.** Nothing.

**CARVER.** I've heard it's a good school.

*(Pause.)*

**FINN.** Will you call me something?

**CARVER.** Mmnh.

**FINN.** Will you call me Boy?

**CARVER.** My boy.

*(CARVER kissing him on the neck.)*

**FINN.** No, just "Boy."

**CARVER.** Lot of stubble for a boy.

**FINN.** *(Dejected:)* It's just something to say.

**CARVER.** And what about me?

**FINN.** What about you.

**CARVER.** What to call me.

*(FINN smiles.)*

**FINN.** "Sir," of course.  
Isn't that how it goes?

**CARVER.** I don't know, Finn.  
You're not a boy.

**FINN.** You've never pretended to be somebody else?

**CARVER.** What's the use of that?

**FINN.** Other people are more fun.  
Other people are... stranger but truer.

**CARVER.** (*"Like who?"*;) Other people.

**FINN.** A restless ghost? The rapacious old ghost of the old valet.

**CARVER.** You must get good grades.

**FINN.** Headmaster who got just a little too strict with his young charge.

**CARVER.** *I'm* not what you want, then.

**FINN.** No. You're...gentle.

**CARVER.** But maybe I could be less—

**FINN.** I doubt it—

**CARVER.** gentle?—

**FINN.** Ow.

*(CARVER has grabbed FINN by the wrist.)*

**CARVER.** You're not what I want either.

**FINN.** Yeah?

**CARVER.** (*Increasingly rough*;) You imagine that old loves young, worships youth whenever it has the good will to come around but you're wrong. I want sincere, not some teenybopper trying to escape himself / not some

**FINN.** (*Excited*;) Hey.

**CARVER.** backward narcissist some

**FINN.** (*On the verge of scared now*;) Hey.

**CARVER.** Infant.

*(CARVER releases him, roughly.)*

*(Pause. They stand at a distance, looking at each other.)*

**FINN.** *(Excited:)* Better.

**CARVER.** *(Excited:)* Better.

*(Pause. CARVER begins to remove his necktie.)*

**CARVER.** I know a trick. I heard this somewhere that it can help whether by keeping the blood in or something to do with the oxygen but...it's supposed to feel amazing, if you do it right.

*(CARVER slips the tie over FINN's head.)*

**FINN.** *(To himself:)* "The education."

**CARVER.** There.

**FINN.** And if you do it wrong?

*(CARVER kisses him. A short, soft kiss that FINN doesn't respond to.)*

**FINN.** It's so quiet down here. I feel like we fell off the earth, you know? Or the bombs really did drop.

*(Pause.)*

**FINN.** What time is it.

*(CARVER has a watch, but he doesn't look at it.)*

**CARVER.** Late.

**FINN.** No one's come for me.

**CARVER.** Why would they?

*(This rings a bit darkly.)*

**FINN.** *(Agreeing, hiding his fear:)* Why would they.

*(FINN tightens the tie as though he's a businessman getting ready for work and CARVER is his mirror.)*

**FINN.** How am I?

*(CARVER is touching him.)*

**CARVER.** But tighter, Boy.

**6:53 pm on the grandfather clock.**

*(Ground floor of the house. Dwindling sunlight through ancient curtains, picking up the dust in the air. GWEN has a cordless phone, presiding over the mess. FINN is looking through boxes. He isn't wearing the cap.)*

**GWEN.** If you want the 78s, we should stake a claim.

**FINN.** Maybe the Rosemary Clooneys?  
I could have a White Christmas party...

*(More rifling.)*

**FINN.** *(Making an effort:)* Um, how's Dad.

**GWEN.** He says hello.

**FINN.** How's Jeremy.

**GWEN.** He watches TV. Sometimes that smart-mouthed Mormon girl comes to see him.

**FINN.** Do they, like, fool around?

**GWEN.** *(“And that's all I want to know”:)* They watch TV.

**FINN.** And you?

**GWEN.** *(Rather tepidly:)* I'm, I don't know, fine.  
I read.

**FINN.** It's like you're some kind of *Chekhovian* family.

**GWEN.** People in Chekhov don't watch TV.

**FINN.** I mean people slowly lowering their expectations, watching life go by as they slowly crumble in a house in a wooded place.

**GWEN.** What a thing to say.

**FINN.** Just: It feels good to be out of reach of you guys, now and then.

**GWEN.** But now you're here.

*(GWEN gives him a hug. (She's borrowing Rhoda's gesture from the first scene, but it doesn't work this time.)*

**GWEN.** Hi.

**FINN.** You're, what, hugging me?

*(She releases him.)*

**GWEN.** I know intimacy is...foreign to you.

**FINN.** No it isn't.

**GWEN.** That's the story I tell myself. The reason / that you'd

**FINN.** But it's *earned*, usually.

**GWEN.** be lonely enough to take up with your professor, your / *married* professor.

**FINN.** Oh now we're talking about—

**GWEN.** *(Explosively now:)* Older than me with a whole / *stable life*

**FINN.** He made it clear he / preferred me

**GWEN.** ...and then go and do that to his wife, / to publicly—

**FINN.** I was in love with him! *(Less sensational now:)* Maybe. I loved being with him, I loved him.

**GWEN.** oh.

**FINN.** Tell me that you're impervious to that—when people say you're beautiful, that they need you, that you...

**GWEN.** No.

**FINN.** ...burn brightly.

**GWEN.** No. I'm not impervious. I'm quite...susceptible.

**FINN.** And when people take that away, all of a sudden.

**GWEN.** Yes.

*(Pause. The closest thing to a tenderness between them.)*

**FINN.** You're susceptible?

**GWEN.** I mean: the things I see.

**FINN.** Oh yeah.

**GWEN.** And hear. I try not to hear.

**FINN.** (*Compassionately:*) What if you didn't try? What if you just listened?

**GWEN.** Then maybe I'd go crazy?  
Do you think I'm crazy?

**FINN.** You're not crazy.  
Do you think *I'm* crazy?

**GWEN.** I think the world doesn't move fast enough for you.

**FINN.** (*Pleased with this assessment:*) Yeah.

**GWEN.** You were always easy to flatter.

**FINN.** You were always easy to...untether.

*(Short pause.)*

*(The playful moment dissipates.)*

**GWEN.** Were you ever scared of this house, when you were young?

**FINN.** I just remember the smell. Mothballs and Chanel #5.

**GWEN.** It'll be good to have a new family living here, a young family again. Each time has its own fear, I think.

**FINN.** ?

**GWEN.** I mean each era? And I think...to know what people were like back then, you need to know what they were scared of.

**FINN.** You mean, what happened...

**GWEN.** And what *didn't* happen. The things we waited for, lying in bed. The half-expected doom hanging over our heads. Does the house remember those things, or just the people in the house?

**FINN.** (*À la Keanu:*) "Heavy."

**GWEN.** (*"Don't belittle this":*) Yes.

**FINN.** Sorry.

**GWEN.** I'm going to—I have to call Gramma.

**FINN.** Okay.

*(She's dialing.)*

**GWEN.** (*Very brightly now:*) Hi Mom!  
We're making headway.

**FINN.** Phone voice.

**GWEN.** (*Covering the receiver, to FINN:*) 78s?  
(*He shrugs.*)

**GWEN.** (*Into the phone again:*) Uhuh. Yes.

—

We found someone for the piano and. Huh.  
(*She starts to head up the stairs.*)

Yes, he's here.

—

Yes, he's interested in Rosemary Clooney.

—

No I think she's still alive.

No, the homely one. You're thinking of Peggy Lee. Unless they're both dead.

—

Mom, do you remember the Adams photograph, the Ansel Adams?  
Do you care about that, because I...

(*GWEN has walked out of earshot. FINN has started looking through the wooden box of papers. He finds something.*)

**FINN.** (*Reading:*)

"From the Desk of Rhoda Rockford.

Babysitting Report, June 7, 1962.

Gwen cried and would not go to sleep.

Gwen was told it's bedtime and she *cried*.

Gwen did not do what she's told, and kept asking why doesn't Carver babysit anymore.

Gwen questioned my authority as sitter and I advise for Gwen to be punished."

(FINN eyes the box where he found Will's things. He goes to it and takes the red cap out.)

**GWEN.** *(From upstairs:)* Fifteen minutes, we're leaving!

**FINN.** *(Yelling back up:)* Are we dressing up?

*(He puts on the red cap.)*

*I said, are we getting fancy?*

**GWEN.** *(From upstairs:)* Have you ever seen your aunt "get fancy"?

*(FINN checks his reflection in one of the framed pictures. He smiles: the hat doesn't really suit him.)*

*(He turns and sees: CARVER is standing there, all of a sudden, in the open front door.)*

**CARVER.** Oh hi, is your mom here or...

**FINN.** Who are you?

**CARVER.** Sorry, I live down the road? I saw the cars and I thought. *(Seeing the bare room, the boxes.)* Wow.

*(The grandfather clock begins to chime 7 o'clock.)*

**FINN.** Yeah we've got enough crap, huh?

*(CARVER looks down at the door to the shelter.)*

**CARVER.** I remember everything.

**FINN.** *(Venting:)* Families.

**CARVER.** "Families?"

**FINN.** *This* family.

**CARVER.** I like your hat.

**FINN.** *(Remembering he has it on, his hand flying up to touch it:)* Oh. Thanks.

*(The last chime of the grandfather clock. Suddenly quiet.)*

**CARVER.** *(Extending his hand:)* Carver Bishop.

*(Pause. FINN doesn't shake CARVER's hand.)*

What's your name?

*(FINN smirks and shakes his head.)*

What.

**FINN.** "Don't talk to strangers."

**CARVER.** I'm not a stranger. My name's Carver.

*(FINN tugs on CARVER's necktie.)*

**FINN.** (*"Pretty nerdy":*) Your initials.

**CARVER.** I live right downhill in the red house.

*(RHODA enters, unnoticed, carrying a cardboard box.)*

The little red house down... *(He points without looking.)*

**FINN.** Is it made all of candy?

**CARVER.** *(Catching on:)* Peppermint sticks and licorice.

**FINN.** *(Playing hard to get:)* I hate licorice.

**CARVER.** And a witch, a hungry witch.

**FINN.** And apples with razor blades / inside.

**RHODA.** Finn, get dressed for dinner.

*(He turns to RHODA, unfazed.)*

**FINN.** This is what I'm wearing.

**CARVER.** *(To himself:)* "Finn."

**RHODA.** (*"You're wearing the hat again":*) Something you button and tuck in.

*(FINN takes off the hat and puts it in his back pocket.)*

It's a nice place.

*(FINN gives CARVER a last glance before heading up the stairs. We see him hiding throughout the following, crouched on the top steps.)*

**RHODA.** I don't remember hearing the doorbell.

**CARVER.** You look a little tired, Rhoda.

**RHODA.** I'm surprised to see you.

**CARVER.** Not much noise on this street anymore.  
I figured the return of the sisters was worth a visit.

**RHODA.** We're selling. *(Off the bare room:)* Clearly.  
And when we're gone, it'll be the end of this...intrigue.

**CARVER.** I wanted to forget as much as you.

**RHODA.** I don't believe you / Carver

**CARVER.** I don't give a fuck what / you believe

**RHODA.** What did you say?

*(Short pause.)*

**CARVER.** *(Really sorry:)* I'm sorry, I. They bought Will a beautiful  
tombstone and neither of my parents ever spoke his name again.

**RHODA.** *(Really sorry:)* I'm sorry.

**CARVER.** Someone had to say his name.

*(Pause.)*

**RHODA.** You met Finn.

**CARVER.** *(“That's all”:) Talking.*

**RHODA.** I saw you.

**CARVER.** He's a charming young man.

**RHODA.** He's bored. That can be the most dangerous thing.

**CARVER.** *(“Really that was all”:) We said hello.*

**RHODA.** He's not as experienced as he looks.

*(CARVER can see FINN hiding, over RHODA's shoulder. He says  
this more for Finn's benefit than for Rhoda's:)*

**CARVER.** He doesn't look so very experienced.

**RHODA.** Why don't you leave now, Carver.

**CARVER.** *(Not impolitely:) Goodbye Rhoda.*

**RHODA.** Goodbye.

**CARVER.** Shame we lost track.

*(And he's out the door. Without turning around, RHODA speaks to FINN, still on the stairs—she's guessed that he's still there.)*

**RHODA.** That was the man you heard about, Finn.  
A real old-fashioned gentleman.

**FINN.** Real old at least.

*(She turns to look at him now.)*

**RHODA.** We're the same age.  
We spent a lot of time together, back before...

**GWEN.** *(Off, from upstairs:)* Ten minutes, we have to go!

**FINN.** Before you realized you weren't his type?

**RHODA.** Your mom lets you run wild but if you were mine...

**FINN.** But I'm not.

*(FINN heads toward the door.)*

**RHODA.** Where are you going?

**FINN.** I left my suitcase in the car.

*(And he's gone, out the door, after CARVER.)*

*(GWEN is suddenly visible at the top of the stairs.)*

**GWEN.** *(Dressed for dinner.)* How am I?

**RHODA.** I like that scarf.

**GWEN.** Oh good. It felt risky.

**RHODA.** *(Fascinated by her self-consciousness:)* Risky?

**GWEN.** You know, *patterns*.  
Where's Finn?

**RHODA.** Carport.

**GWEN.** *(Shouting off:)* Finn, ten minutes!

**RHODA.** Carver was here.

*(Short pause. GWEN turns back to RHODA.)*

**FINN.** *(From off:)* Okay!

**GWEN.** What do you mean, “here.”

**RHODA.** Strolled up from the red house to spread discord.

**GWEN.** Rhoda.

**RHODA.** What.

**GWEN.** They tore down the red house a year ago.

*(A short pause, then very quickly:)*

**RHODA.** He said the house

**GWEN.** After he died

**RHODA.** He

**GWEN.** Carver Bishop

**RHODA.** Died?

*(RHODA looks at the door, where CARVER and FINN just left.)*

**GWEN.** Suicide.

Mom didn't send you the clipping?

**RHODA.** He was *here*. I talked to him.

*(GWEN takes the bottle of pills out of her pocket and shakes them at RHODA. An offering.)*

**RHODA.** What.

**GWEN.** For clarity.

**9:33 pm on the grandfather clock.**

*(We can just barely make out CARVER and FINN in the dim light of the shelter. CARVER is touching FINN as he speaks, the tie tight around FINN's neck. FINN's eyes closed, concentrating on the feeling.)*

*(Nothing remains of Carver's reticence—his movements and his speech much more assured than when Finn first met him. Perhaps the ticking of the grandfather clock has grown especially loud.)*

**CARVER.** A long time ago when I was very young there was a boy and this boy's name was William.

**FINN.** Will for short.

**CARVER.** Yes, Will with dirty knees.

**FINN.** Will with freckles everywhere.

*(FINN tightens the necktie.)*

**CARVER.** Yes and up the street from Will's little red house there was a man in an evil old house with not a single square corner. This man who taught Will model trains who taught him fireflies in jars who knew all manner of boy things.

*(CARVER tightens the necktie more.)*

**CARVER.** This man who supposed he loved this boy more than his own kids

**FINN.** Yes

**CARVER.** more than his two daughters, although it shamed him, loved him

**FINN.** Yes

**CARVER.** loved him like / his own

**FINN.** *(Very quiet:)* His own.

*(CARVER tightens the necktie again. FINN struggling for air now.)*

**CARVER.** This man who said one day:

*I have a special mission, Boy—*

*Like Harry Houdini, have you heard of Harry Houdini?*

(FINN's eyes shut tight.)

**FINN.** *Sure*

**CARVER.** Said the boy

**FINN.** *Hasn't everybody?*

**CARVER.** *Right, said the man. Fellow who knew how to disappear.*

**FINN.** *Didn't disappear*

**CARVER.** Said the boy, who was rather precocious.

**FINN.** *Got himself out of fixes.*

**CARVER.** *Got himself out of fixes how?* asked the man.

(CARVER tightens the necktie again. FINN lies unconscious now. The grandfather clock comes to a stop at 9:37 pm. [We might see the time projected here.])

**CARVER.** At that, the boy said nothing.

*By holding his breath, of course.* The man went ahead and answered his own question.

*I have a mission for you, Boy, he said. You're going to hold your breath long as you can, like Harry Houdini, counting how long, and the man began to touch him. Seven eight nine ten. This is excellent practice for swimming, said the man. Fourteen fifteen sixteen seven—.*

(*The following calmly, romantically almost.*)

And what I've wondered is why didn't he run. This grown man over him, his eyes vague with desire and he might have run but *fifty-seven*, the boy counted, though his head was swimming and *fifty-eight, fifty-nine, fifty-ten*, the man with his hands—places on himself he didn't even know, and that something tight around his neck making his counting not work right, *fifty-twelve, fifty-teen, fifteen-teen.*

(CARVER stroking the unconscious FINN. His words gradually arrive in the present, the tense loosening.)

And maybe he would have run if he wasn't too busy holding his breath. Or maybe he simply wanted to *learn* but now there is no going back no returning ever to the land he knew, never.

There is no going back for either of us.

*End of Part One*

## **Part Two.**

*(The tiniest space of all.)*

*(Part Two takes place entirely in the shelter, although the characters treat it like a complete universe. I think of Alice's rabbit hole or C.S. Lewis's wardrobe: a tiny space that gives way to an alternate world. It may be interesting for objects that came out of the cardboard boxes in Part One to make appearances here, resurrected. In the Berkeley Rep production, for instance, Rhoda wore the mother's exotic coat that Gwen finds in Part One.)*

*(The feeling now of another, earlier time. (Think of the movies of Douglas Sirk. Think of old etiquette books. Think of your most formal family photographs.) But the shabbiness of the shelter remains visible throughout. No one leaves the playing space, and the scenes flow more freely into one another.)*

*(The grandfather clock is frozen, but we continue to see the time, 9:37 pm, projected at the top of each scene.)*

**9:37 pm on the grandfather clock.**

*(FINN is working on a watercolor painting. He seems pale and fragile now, as if some of the life has been drained from him. He has on the red cap [which he'll wear for the rest of the play]. His mannerisms have not become "childish" so much as they have taken on an odd civility: like a very well-bred, if mercurial, child.)*

*(We see CARVER tying his tie, as if getting ready for work. He speaks out: polished, professional.)*

**CARVER.** Your private fallout shelter need not be too spartan. Try a handsome rug over the poured cement. It's easy to help your family acclimate to a subterranean lifestyle. A well-appointed shelter may even double as a study or rumpus room during peacetime.

**FINN.** Sir?

**CARVER.** Mm.

**FINN.** What's "rumpus"?

**CARVER.** Rumpus: The act of causing a noisy disturbance.

**FINN.** Do you know everything?

**CARVER.** Only useful things.

You look very handsome in your cap, Boy.

**FINN.** Boy?

**CARVER.** Your name.

**FINN.** Oh yes.

**CARVER.** What a strange thing to forget.

**FINN.** Now I remember.

**CARVER.** You're a funny boy, sometimes.

**FINN.** Boy for short.

*(CARVER looks at the painting, impressed.)*

**CARVER.** Well now look at that.

**FINN.** I used twelve colors this time.

**CARVER.** Snow.

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*(We hear GWEN's voice from somewhere above. It sounds faraway, reverberant.)*

*(CARVER hears her but FINN does not.)*

**GWEN.** *(Off:)* Finn, are you down there?

*(A flashlight beam trains across the cellar space. It doesn't find them.)*

**FINN.** I mixed blue and white for ice.

**CARVER.** Your masterpiece. May I keep it?

**FINN.** I haven't signed it yet!

**GWEN.** *(Off:)* Finn? If you're down there we're coming.

**RHODA.** *(Off:)* Can you see anything?

**CARVER.** Shh, Boy. Stay very quiet.

**FINN.** What is it?

**GWEN.** *(Off:)* Cobwebs.

**CARVER.** Be very very quiet or they'll find us.

**FINN.** *(A whisper now:)* Who?

**CARVER.** Ghosts.

**RHODA.** *(Off:)* Careful.

*(The two flashlight beams panning the space. FINN and CARVER stand very very still. FINN looking out. CARVER looking in the direction of the voices.)*

**GWEN.** Finn?

**RHODA.** Careful, nails.

**GWEN.** Finn? I can't see anything.

**RHODA.** Careful.

**9:37 pm on the grandfather clock.**

**GWEN.** Rhoda?

I can't see.

*(GWEN has arrived at the bottom of the stairs. We see her for the first time in Part Two. She looks changed, a part of this world now.)*

Rhoda?

**CARVER.** Gwen, I told you never to come down here.

**GWEN.** Why is it so dark?

**FINN.** It's easy to see in the dark if you eat your vegetables.

*(She shines her flashlight on FINN.)*

**CARVER.** Say Hello to Gwen, Boy.

**FINN.** Hello.

**CARVER.** Say Hello to Boy, Gwen.

**GWEN.** Where did Rhoda go?

**CARVER.** I expect she's with her new beau.

**GWEN.** I thought she was behind me. I thought she was holding my hand.

**CARVER.** She isn't a little girl any more. She has her own games now.

**GWEN.** *(A childlike sigh; as if surrendering to this reality:)* I know.

**CARVER.** *(Faux-gallant, to GWEN:)* Now. To what do we owe this honor, young lady?

**GWEN.** Who wants to watch Ed Sullivan?

**CARVER.** How does that sound, Boy?

**FINN.** I'd rather stay with you.

**GWEN.** Don't stay with him.

He's not who he says he is.

*(We see Rhoda's flashlight on the stairs and hear her voice, as before.)*

**RHODA.** *(Voice only:)* Careful.

**GWEN.** *(To FINN:)* You're not who he says you is.

**RHODA.** *(Voice only:)* Gwen? Can you see him?

**GWEN.** You're not who he says you was.

**RHODA.** There has to be a light.

*(RHODA reaches the bottom of the stairs. She, too, looks changed. FINN and CARVER fade into the background. GWEN seems to be alone now, talking to her ghosts.)*

**RHODA.** Gwen?

**GWEN.** Who's not who we says you was.

**RHODA.** That's strange. I can't remember what I came down here for.

*(GWEN shakes the bottle of pills at RHODA, like in Part One.)*

**RHODA.** *(Entering the bad dream now:)* Of course. It's time for your pill.

**GWEN.** *You's* not who we says you was.

**RHODA.** *(Taking out a pill:)* Yes, yes, that all makes terrific sense. Now open.

**GWEN.** *(Like at the dentist:)* Ahhhhh.

**RHODA.** I thought I might find you down here, playing with the cobwebs and cockroaches. Getting your pretty skirt dirty. *(Taking the flashlight from GWEN.)* We're having company this afternoon and I want you on your best behavior. A gentleman is coming to outfit us with a fallout shelter. The whole operation seems rather whimsical. *Sleep easier or your money back*, the advertisement said. I'd like to sleep easier, wouldn't you?

*(GWEN doesn't say anything.)*

**RHODA.** There's such a lot to dread these days.

**GWEN.** *We's* not who we says we was.

**RHODA.** What's inside that poor head.

**9:37 pm on the grandfather clock.**

*(Light shifts. CARVER and FINN are now visible.)*

*(FINN is painting, as in the previous scene. CARVER is putting on his necktie.)*

**CARVER.** A shallow well in the floor of your shelter can provide a safe water supply during your stay underground. In most areas, the water base is only twenty feet below the surface. Our simple instruction manual will guide you, step by step, through the excavation.

**FINN.** Sir?

**CARVER.** Mm.

**FINN.** What's "excavation"?

**CARVER.** Excavation: The digging of holes in the ground.

**FINN.** What kind of holes?

**CARVER.** Holes that contain an absence of dirt or other matter.

*(Pause.)*

Boy, would you like to practice your Wills and Will-Nots for me?

**FINN.** No thank you.

**CARVER.** I like to hear your lessons.

**FINN.** No one likes lessons.

**CARVER.** It makes me proud of you.

**FINN.** *(Out:)* A list of Will-Nots:

I will not use my fork to mash my vegetables down like a field about to be planted.

I will not neglect to address my superiors as madam or sir or sometimes miss.

I will not venture out until the air is safe for living again.

**CARVER.** Now, your list of Wills.

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*(As FINN recites the following, CARVER begins to touch him—a paternal touch that shifts into a sexual one. FINN, looking out, doesn't seem to notice.)*

**FINN.** A list of Wills:

I will mind my manners.

I will mind my please and thank-yous.

I will mind my kind and counterfeit father.

I will mind my own name.

**CARVER.** Excellent.

Boy, I have an appointment.

You'll be all right practicing your Wills and Will-Nots?

*(CARVER starts to leave.)*

**FINN.** I can't come too?

**CARVER.** Your grammar, Boy. / You *cannot*

**FINN.** I *cannot* come along too.

**CARVER.** Precisely.

**FINN.** Please, oh please. I don't want to be alone.

**CARVER.** The boys would call you sissy if they saw you. Afraid of your own house.

**FINN.** You told me there were ghosts.

**CARVER.** I was playing a game.

**FINN.** You were not.

**CARVER.** You're getting too old for this nonsense.

**FINN.** I can be so quiet you won't know I'm there.

*(Pause.)*

**CARVER.** *(To FINN:)* Get your coat then.

*(FINN jumps to his feet.)*

*(CARVER stamps on the ground three times. It seems to shake the whole house.)*

**9:37 pm on the grandfather clock.**

*(Light shifts. RHODA goes to answer the door, as if she's just heard a knock.)*

*(CARVER takes her hand, rather gallantly, not shaking it. FINN is there too—peering from behind CARVER, sheepish.)*

**CARVER.** You're doing the right thing, Mrs. Rockford.

**RHODA.** You mentioned on the phone.

**CARVER.** Protecting our families must come first.

**RHODA.** You sound very knowledgeable.

**FINN.** Sir knows everything useful.

**RHODA.** What's useful?

**FINN.** Keeping safe!

**RHODA.** What a charming boy.

**FINN.** *(Rather impudent:)* Thirteen isn't a boy.

**CARVER.** He's small for thirteen.

**FINN.** The doctor said I'll be having a spurt.

**CARVER.** Usually I hear it's a terrible age but he's immensely well-behaved.

**RHODA.** *(Rather flirtatious:)* Something to do with his father.

**FINN.** He isn't my father.

**RHODA.** *(“That's a little strange”:)* No?

**CARVER.** I look after the boy when his mother isn't around.

**FINN.** He's always around.

**CARVER.** *(Flirtatious in return:)* I run a tight ship, yes.

*(GWEN is there now. She looks disturbed, like the ghosts in her head have come to life.)*

**RHODA.** This is my sister Gwen.

**GWEN.** *(Pointing:)* Finn.

(RHODA shakes her head, prohibitively.)

**GWEN.** He looks just like—

**RHODA.** Would you boys like finger sandwiches?

**FINN.** Yes, please!

**CARVER.** If it's too much trouble...

**RHODA.** They're in the fridge.

**FINN.** (To CARVER:.) Please.

**RHODA.** (To GWEN:.) He's very well-behaved.

(FINN extends his hand.)

**FINN.** Boy is my name.

(GWEN just looks at his hand, puzzled.)

**GWEN.** That's not a name.

(CARVER squeezes FINN's shoulder—paternal support.)

**CARVER.** Mrs. Rockford, have you ever invested in post-atomic security before?

**RHODA.** Miss Rockford.

**9:37 pm on the grandfather clock.**

(Light shifts. RHODA is prettifying herself, as if at a vanity.)

**RHODA.** ...A gentleman, Gwen, a true-blue gentleman—and we thought they were extinct! I know the neighborhood coffee klatch expected me to live out the rest of my days an old maid. I think they *desired* it even—someone to make them treasure their own wandering husbands. The noble woman tethered to a haunted sister. But now, but now it's as if I can see a whole *life* gathering around this one quiet man with a sample case and a look in his eyes—like he didn't really come to tell me about atomic preparations, that he just...wanted to know me. But now I'm getting ahead of myself, oh Gwen! A feather in his hat and well-shined shoes and his small and civil son!

*(GWEN looks over RHODA's shoulder: CARVER is there, seemingly receiving oral sex from FINN. A flash of red cap, perhaps, but the shadows make it difficult to see.)*

**GWEN.** Had a son once but didn't always recognize him.

**RHODA.** You mustn't let your voices get the better of you.

*(CARVER puts his hand on the back of FINN's head, holding him there.)*

**CARVER.** *(To himself, regarding the sensation:)* Beautiful.

**GWEN.** *(Sounding like RHODA:)* "If my son did something like that..."

**RHODA.** You don't have a son.

*(Carver and Finn's light fades out—the room is suddenly more still.)*

**RHODA.** I spoke with Dr. Landecker. Such a nice man. He praised your alertness especially, and said you might even reenter the world. The whole world out there, Gwen! If you just set your mind to it and of course your pills.

*(To herself, remembering:)*

Your pills.

Where's your head.

**GWEN.** Some days he woke up different.

**RHODA.** Open sesame.

**GWEN.** Sharp things came out of his mouth.

**RHODA.** I said *open*.

*(RHODA puts a blue pill in GWEN's mouth, holds her nose and forces the pill down. This should look routine and rather barbaric at the same time.)*

*(RHODA looks at the [frozen] grandfather clock, as though it can tell her the time.)*

**RHODA.** He'll be here soon.

How do I look?

**GWEN.** The man down the street played a tune with one hand  
And sweets in the other and my son followed him down down  
down with his nose on the ground like a bloodhound and dancing  
feet.

**RHODA.** I miss Gwen.

**GWEN.** I miss Gwen.

**RHODA.** Shush.

*(Pause. RHODA opens the pills again.)*

Let's have another then.

**9:37 pm on the grandfather clock.**

*(Light shifts. CARVER is tying his tie. FINN is painting.)*

**CARVER.** It may be a good idea to take family outings in your new  
shelter, so that everyone will be accustomed to living in close quar-  
ters, when the time comes. If your family is well prepared, there is  
no reason to fear. Families with children will want to stock their  
shelter with recreational materials, in order to ward off monotony.

**FINN.** Sir?

**CARVER.** Mm.

**FINN.** What's monotony?

**CARVER.** Monotony: The condition of tedious sameness.

**FINN.** It sounds like Monopoly.

**CARVER.** I have an appointment this afternoon, Boy.

**FINN.** Then I will come along.

**CARVER.** You may not. I'm going to call on Miss Rockford.

**FINN.** Again?

**CARVER.** I value my time with Miss Rockford.

**FINN.** She isn't a Miss.

**CARVER.** She is a wonderful woman.

**FINN.** (*A warning:*) She isn't a mother.

**CARVER.** She is a good woman lit from within and you won't talk of her that way.

A gentleman spends his life alone and people start to whisper...  
I've decided to ask Miss Rockford to be my wife.

**FINN.** (*A realization:*) You want them too.

**CARVER.** Don't be jealous.

**FINN.** The house wants them.

**CARVER.** We'll still get to have fun.  
And think how nice to have a mother.

**FINN.** You can't.

**CARVER.** And why on earth not?

**FINN.** Because I'll tell.

*(This terrifies CARVER.)*

**CARVER.** No you won't.

**FINN.** I'll tell her / that you fancy me.

**CARVER.** If you tell anything I'll send you away.

*(CARVER has him by the arm, roughly.)*

**FINN.** Yes, I will tell her.

**CARVER.** I'll send you outside where the bombs can turn you to particles.

**FINN.** You're hurting.

**CARVER.** This is how you wanted me, you terrible boy. Too gentle.  
Do you remember?

I was just me but you wanted someone else.

**FINN.** I want to go back.

*(In CARVER's grip.)* I've had enough of your gentleness.

**CARVER.** Nobody is going anywhere.  
We're going to be a family.  
Mother and dad and sister and son.

(FINN kisses CARVER on the mouth. CARVER accepts the kiss, but then releases FINN, roughly. [This might remind us of the gesture in Part One that preceded “—Better. —Better.”])

**CARVER.** Sit in the corner until I return and practice your Will-Nots.

**FINN.** *(Like a child again:)* I’m sorry.

**CARVER.** I’m sorry what.

**FINN.** Sorry Sir.

**CARVER.** Your lessons.

*(CARVER grabs his hat and coat.)*

**FINN.** A list of Will-Nots:

I will not sit in the middle but in the corner where the sorry sit.

I will not ruin my supper be it with sweets or with savories.

*(FINN watches CARVER leave. More ruefully now:)*

I will not come along.

*(Lights shift so that GWEN and RHODA are now visible, as they were in the last scene.)*

**FINN.**

Rather, a list of Wills:

I will see how small I can make myself.

I will slip through the keyholes for practice.

I will secret myself between the floorboards and

I will wait for the bombs to drop and

I will learn the language of the cockroaches.

I will learn what they whisper between themselves.

*(FINN turns and sees them: RHODA has lifted the bottle of pills to administer them to GWEN. At this instant, GWEN strikes her hand, hard, and the blue pills go flying across the floor.)*

**GWEN.** No!

**RHODA.** What have you done you devil girl.

**GWEN.** Devilgirl.

*(Sound of a teapot coming to boil in the next room.)*

**RHODA.** That's right and dusty pills for you if that's what you want.

**GWEN.** Teatime for tea!

**RHODA.** If you ruin this, Gwen, with your attention-getting! My one, last chance—if you ruin this!

*(CARVER stamps three times on the floor, but RHODA looks in the direction of the door. It seems to shake the whole house.)*

**RHODA.** Carver.

**9:37 pm on the grandfather clock.**

*(Light shifts. RHODA pouring tea. CARVER giving a demonstration, his briefcase open.)*

*(FINN is visible too, seen only by CARVER.)*

**CARVER.** I think you'll find the science of it very unthreatening, Miss Rockford. A simple well in the floor of the shelter provides a safe water supply during the weeks or months underground. And of course, you have my card if you should need more hands-on guidance...

**RHODA.** Sugar?

**CARVER.** No, this is good.

*(RHODA sits.)*

**CARVER.** *(Differently now, as if trying to convince himself:)* This is good.

**RHODA.** Is anything the matter?

**CARVER.** I haven't been completely truthful with you.

**RHODA.** You mean

**CARVER.** These visits.

I mean I'm not...only interested in preparing you for a post-atomic situation.

**RHODA.** *(Relieved:)* No.

**CARVER.** No.

**RHODA.** I was trying not to let myself think it but I hoped. All these house calls. I did think you were being especially thorough.

*(FINN is standing behind RHODA, on the same axis, so that it appears that CARVER is looking right through RHODA at him.)*

**CARVER.** Soon as you opened the door, soon as I saw you standing there I wanted you.

**RHODA.** You shouldn't speak like that.

**CARVER.** Speak my mind?

**RHODA.** I'm modest.

*(Pause.)*

I've so seldom had room in my life for...

**CARVER.** Why not, a handsome woman like you?

**RHODA.** My Gwen requires a great deal of attention.

**CARVER.** She has a pretty face...

**RHODA.** Ghosted.

**CARVER.** ...even if her eyes don't always make sense.

**RHODA.** *(Rather too brusquely:)* What happened to the boy's father and mother?

If I may ask...

**CARVER.** His father has been absent a long time. His mother is seldom of any use to him. So I...

**RHODA.** You were useful.

**CARVER.** He took a liking to me and I to him.

**RHODA.** A role model.

**CARVER.** The world is a dangerous place. Not just bombs I mean but...people with bad intentions.

**RHODA.** Don't let him out of your sight.

**CARVER.** Never.

*(A short pause.)*

**RHODA.** A lovely boy.

**CARVER.** Except sometimes he'll get a look in his eye—a cold, adult look like some imp with a dark purpose, and I hardly recognize him.

**RHODA.** Maybe he needs a mother?

**CARVER.** People do like to talk... An old bachelor like me—what do I know about raising a boy?

**RHODA.** People *do* like to talk.

**CARVER.** *(Too quickly:)* What do they say?

**RHODA.** You know, small town gossip. They think you're rather a...bohemian.

But now we can prove them wrong?

*(RHODA puts her hand on CARVER's. It sits there, unrecognized. She removes it.)*

We should probably have a look at your contracts, although I confess I haven't the head for these things.

**CARVER.** Or instead. Instead, what if we were to be married?

**RHODA.** You...love me then?

**CARVER.** I've never felt so secure.

**RHODA.** Then you don't love me.

**CARVER.** There are other reasons to marry.

*(Short pause.)*

**RHODA.** I don't care.

*(She embraces him.)*

This is too good. I don't care.

*(FINN is watching.)*

**9:37 pm on the grandfather clock.**

*(Light shifts. FINN and GWEN in one part of the room, RHODA and CARVER in another. Looking almost like a family—mother and father and sister and son.)*

*(CARVER is watching FINN with GWEN, as though there is the threat of insubordination.)*

**FINN.** Want to play a game?

**GWEN.** Why.

**FINN.** Sir says to be nice to you, now that we're a family. So I'm being nice.

**GWEN.** "Sir says."

**FINN.** Sir says you can't help the way you are.

**GWEN.** Why do you call him Sir.

**FINN.** Good sons say Sir.

**GWEN.** You're not his son.

**FINN.** He says I'm his.

**GWEN.** He's lying.  
You're not his.

*(CARVER approaches.)*

He just feels sorry for you.  
You're not his.

**CARVER.** What's going on here?

**GWEN.** We were just playing.

**CARVER.** Is that true?

**FINN.** Yes.

**CARVER.** Remember, Boy, /  
"I will always play fair and encourage fair play."

**FINN.** *(By rote:)* "I will always play fair and encourage fair play."

## **THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!**

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