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450 Seventh Ave, Suite 809  
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*For my mother.*

## Cast of Characters

RACHEL, The Mother. A white African woman in her 30s.

JAMES, The Father. A white American man in his 30s.

TANYA, The Principal. An African-American woman in her 40s.

MS. KENNEDY, The Teacher. An American woman in her 20s.

LUCIA, The Counselor. A Latina woman in her 40s.

## Setting

This is a play with five locations: The principal's office, Rachel and James' suburban kitchen, Ms. Kennedy's third grade classroom, Lucia's child therapy office, and a park.

Although detail is occasionally called for in the script, it need not be interpreted literally. All the locations can be suggested simply with desks and chairs of differing heights and levels of comfort. An ability to move fluidly between the spaces is key. Perhaps the pieces of furniture remain on stage throughout, and are pulled forward to create the particular power construct of each location.

## Acknowledgments

*Stray* was developed with through readings at the Black Dahlia Theatre, Ensemble Studio Theatre, Cultural Conversations—Penn State University, and Abingdon Theatre.

*Stray* was originally co-produced in Los Angeles by the Black Dahlia Theatre (Matt Shakman, Artistic Director) and Chalk Repertory Theatre (Jennifer Chang, Amy Ellenberger, Larissa Kokernot, Ruth McKee, Teri Reeves and Hilary Ward, Artistic Circle), opening October 17, 2009. The cast and crew were as follows:

RACHEL . . . . .	Analeis Lorig
JAMES . . . . .	Matt Gaydos
TANYA . . . . .	Angela Bullock
MS. KENNEDY . . . . .	Jennifer Chang
LUCIA . . . . .	Eileen Galindo
Director . . . . .	Larissa Kokernot
Set design . . . . .	Tom Ontiveros
Lighting design . . . . .	Mike Durst
Costume design . . . . .	Rachel Shachar
Sound design and original music . . . . .	Mike Shapiro
Stage manager . . . . .	Jimmy Ng

## Acknowledgments (continued)

The play was further developed and produced by the Cherry Lane Theatre (Angelina Fiordellisi, Artistic Director) as a part of their Mentor Project, opening March 16, 2010. The mentor for the play was David Henry Hwang, and the cast and crew were as follows:

RACHEL . . . . . Emily Ackerman  
JAMES . . . . . Antony Hagopian  
TANYA . . . . . Petronia Paley  
MS. KENNEDY . . . . . Brianne Berkson  
LUCIA . . . . . Lisa Ramirez  
  
Director . . . . . Giovanna Sardelli  
Set design . . . . . Kina Park  
Lighting design . . . . . Pat Dignan  
Costume design . . . . . Rebecca Bernstein  
Sound design . . . . . Daniel Kluger  
Stage manager . . . . . Hannah Perryman

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Originally developed by Cherry Lane Theatre, Angelina Fiordellisi, Artistic Director.

# STRAY

by Ruth McKee

## ACT I

### Scene 1

*(The principal's office. TANYA sits behind a large and imposing desk. RACHEL and JAMES sit across from her in straight-backed chairs.)*

**TANYA.** I think we all know why we're here.

**JAMES.** Your secretary called us.

**RACHEL.** And she said there was a letter, before that. You sent home a letter?

**TANYA.** There was a series of letters.

**JAMES.** We only found one in Daniel's bag.

**RACHEL.** After we got the call. If we'd found it before we would have responded.

**JAMES.** We're not negligent.

**TANYA.** But you're not in the habit of looking in your son's bag.

**RACHEL.** No. We—

**JAMES.** We believe in personal space. If Daniel has something he needs to give us, it's his responsibility to do that.

**TANYA.** But it doesn't appear that he knows that, does it?

**RACHEL.** James has this philosophy. He comes from a big family.

**JAMES.** I grew up in a house with seven other children. No private space anywhere in the house. No bag that someone wouldn't snoop into, no door you could shut to close out the world. I started a journal, and I had to dig a hole in the ground behind the garage, just to have a safe place to put it.

**TANYA.** That's a very interesting story Mr. Martin, but—

**JAMES.** But the neighbor kids found it.

**TANYA.** I'm sorry.

**JAMES.** We value our child's privacy. That's all I'm trying to say.

**TANYA.** I grew up in a big family, too.

**JAMES.** Then you understand!

*(Pause, TANYA looks the parents over.)*

**TANYA.** I understand that Daniel is an only child.

**RACHEL.** Yes.

**JAMES.** Well, for now.

**TANYA.** Now is what we are discussing.

**RACHEL.** He had siblings before. In his first family there were five others.

**JAMES.** He...we adopted him.

**TANYA.** I deduced that.

*(Long pause. TANYA tries to figure out how to start the conversation.)*

I'd like to talk about the letters.

**JAMES.** He hasn't been doing his homework.

**RACHEL.** He has trouble concentrating, in the evenings. Nighttime is very difficult for him. We've been trying to get him to do it in the mornings, but he's still adjusting to the time change. We've just... we've only just arrived.

**JAMES.** We were living in Africa. In Uganda.

**TANYA.** And that's where Daniel...

**RACHEL.** He's from there, yes.

*(TANYA makes a note.)*

**TANYA.** Ms. Kennedy didn't know the best way to go about communicating with you. I would have recommended she call you right away, but it's still early in the school year and she thought she could wait until parent-teacher conference day, talk to you in person.

**RACHEL.** That's very sweet of her.

**TANYA.** But now it's four weeks into the school year and the problem has already gotten out of hand.

**JAMES.** I'm sure he can still catch up. How much homework could a third-grader have?

**TANYA.** Daniel's academic progress has been...sluggish. But homework isn't the real issue here.

**JAMES.** I don't—

**RACHEL.** James, wait.

TANYA. Does Daniel have any friends, outside of school?

RACHEL. No yet, but back in Uganda—

JAMES. He has cousins here. He's played with them.

RACHEL. We're still hoping that they bond, but it...takes us all a little time to adjust.

TANYA. Daniel doesn't seem to be adjusting.

RACHEL. Well. You have to understand, after what he's been through—

JAMES. Rachel. She doesn't want to know about what he's been through.

TANYA. Why wouldn't I?

RACHEL. His birth family—

JAMES. We agreed not to make our son's past an issue. We want him to have a normal childhood.

RACHEL. But there's no way he's going to have a normal childhood, it's much to late for that!

JAMES. (To TANYA:) We were hoping to give him a fresh start.

TANYA. So I'm to understand that your son has had some sort of trauma?

RACHEL. Yes.

TANYA. And he's in counseling?

RACHEL. Actually, we're still—

JAMES. Rachel is an occupational therapist.

RACHEL. But I'm not really qualified for this. We were hoping that the school could help with—

JAMES. Rachel.

RACHEL. What?

JAMES. (To TANYA:) We'll get him an assessment, if that's something you think he needs.

TANYA. I think that he needs much more than that.

(Long pause. JAMES and RACHEL look at her expectantly.)

TANYA. I called you in here today to tell you that we're going to have to remove your son from his classroom.

JAMES. Excuse me?

**TANYA.** Ms. Kennedy is a new teacher this year, and she has many challenges ahead of her. I'm afraid that your son is already proving more than she can handle.

**JAMES.** What does that mean?

**TANYA.** Ms. Kennedy feels that she's spending more than fifty percent of her time managing your son's behavior. It's not fair to the other students.

**JAMES.** It's not fair to any of the students if the teacher is incompetent.

**TANYA.** This isn't the teacher's fault.

**RACHEL.** If Daniel's behavior is the problem, how is moving him to another class going to help?

**TANYA.** We're a very small school.

**JAMES.** So what are you saying?

**TANYA.** Your son needs extensive counseling and individual attention. And I'm afraid that's not something we're able to provide at Hillside.

**JAMES.** So you're kicking him out? After four weeks.

**TANYA.** I'm recommending—

**JAMES.** Oh, recommending.

**TANYA.** There are other schools in the district that have the resources to deal with behavior like Daniel's. Our school psychologist retired last year, and the post has been frozen. I'm trying to get a Behavior Intervention Specialist from the district, but the wait is going to be... I don't know. But I honestly don't think my teacher can handle him much longer.

**JAMES.** I don't get it. What did he do?

**TANYA.** He has repeatedly threatened the other children with violence.

**JAMES.** Daniel is not a violent kid.

**TANYA.** He has also, on two occasions, threatened his teacher with violence as well.

**RACHEL.** He tells stories. It's just talk, he would never hurt anyone.

**TANYA.** He has told the other children that he would like to (*Reading:*) "scrape their eyeballs with a knife."

**RACHEL.** James is an eye surgeon.

**TANYA.** "Trap them in a corner, bite their ankles until they bleed."

**JAMES.** Oh.

**RACHEL.** He has this thing about a dog—we think that maybe—

(*JAMES shushes RACHEL.*)

(*Pause.*)

**RACHEL.** He says these things when he's feeling vulnerable. It's a defense mechanism. And he's just...he's been very vulnerable lately.

**TANYA.** Whatever the reason, they are still violent threats, and we have a no-tolerance policy for threats at this school. So we do have the right to remove Daniel, we can even get the police involved if we choose to. We do have that option.

**RACHEL.** Daniel is eight years old.

**TANYA.** I didn't say that was the option we were choosing.

**RACHEL.** Okay.

**TANYA.** The district has a magnet program for children with disabilities.

**JAMES.** You want to put him in special ed?

**RACHEL.** Daniel isn't disabled. He just needs special attention while he adjusts to the environment.

**TANYA.** And at Franklin Elementary they have a 1 to 5 teacher to student ratio, so he'll be able to get that attention.

**JAMES.** In a warehouse with a bunch of kids who have real problems! Autism, mental retardation.

**RACHEL.** James has a brother who's disabled. He wasn't very well-served by the public school system.

**JAMES.** Rachel, you don't have to—

**TANYA.** Times have changed since your brother was in school.

**JAMES.** Sure, funding's been cut, teacher-student ratios have gone up...

**TANYA.** I meant the teaching philosophies.

**RACHEL.** I don't know if I like the idea of—how far away is Franklin Elementary?

**TANYA.** It's in the Metro Park area.

**RACHEL.** I really don't like the idea of Daniel having to travel away from his community to go to school. In Uganda it was just a five-minute walk, and he—his friends, when he makes friends, will be from all over the city? I don't—

**JAMES.** Rachel's still getting comfortable with driving on the right side of the road.

**RACHEL.** That's not the point I was making.

**JAMES.** I know.

**TANYA.** I'm offering Franklin as a option, one I strongly recommend, but there are other options.

**JAMES.** Like what? Spend thirty-thousand dollars to send him to a private school?

**TANYA.** That's one.

**JAMES.** We don't have that kind of money right now, I've just bought into my family's practice, and my last job was non-profit, so...

*(Awkward silence.)*

We need to discuss another option.

**TANYA.** What's that?

**JAMES.** Keeping him here in this school.

**TANYA.** No.

**JAMES.** We moved here, we chose this neighborhood, specifically so he could go to this school.

**RACHEL.** We thought a school this size, with its mixed population, and with a principal like you, would be more likely to be...understanding.

**TANYA.** Sometimes it's harder for a small school to handle special children.

**RACHEL.** But you can't really just shuffle every kid with problems off to someone else. There have to be people here who can help.

*(Pause. TANYA looks at her feet.)*

**JAMES.** We'll see the therapist, we'll get him the assessment, and you'll let him stay.

**TANYA.** *(Beat.)* An assessment isn't going to help my teacher. I have a real issue on my hands here. A personnel issue, a safety issue—

**JAMES.** Then why don't you give us a chance to talk with her.

**RACHEL.** Maybe if she heard his whole story—if she knew about his past—

**JAMES.** *(To TANYA.)* It just...it feels like we're being ambushed here.

**TANYA.** That wasn't my intention.

**JAMES.** But you'd already made up your mind when you brought us in here, and we had no idea that any of this was going on. You have to give us a chance to catch up.

**TANYA.** There were notes.

**JAMES.** Give us a week. We'll pull Daniel out for a few days, give everyone a cooling-off period. We'll see if we can work something out.

**TANYA.** I—

**RACHEL.** We could meet with his teacher right now if she's available.

**TANYA.** She's not.

**JAMES.** Then you can set up a meeting for later this week.

**TANYA.** Mr. Martin—

**JAMES.** My son's going to get a fair hearing, that's all I'm asking. We can do this the easy way, or we can do it the hard way.

**TANYA.** I was offering you the easy way.

**JAMES.** You're not really going to go to the police about an eight-year-old child.

**TANYA.** *(Long pause.)* No.

**JAMES.** Then set up a meeting. We'll get all of this sorted out.

*(Lights.)*

## Scene 2

*(Lucia's child-therapy office. A large desk and a comfortable stuffed chair. The colors are welcoming. LUCIA sorts through photos on her desk. TANYA enters and makes herself at home.)*

**LUCIA.** You don't knock?

**TANYA.** You're not busy.

**LUCIA.** No, I'm just...working on a project.

**TANYA.** I thought I'd come see if you wanted to grab dinner.

**LUCIA.** It's Robert's birthday.

**TANYA.** You talk to him?

**LUCIA.** I left him a message. He's supposed to call me back.

**TANYA.** So you're waiting by the phone.

**LUCIA.** I left this number.

**TANYA.** He's probably out with his friends. He's not going to call you tonight.

**LUCIA.** You have to speak to your mother on your birthday. It's a rule.

**TANYA.** Even when you're not speaking to her the rest of the time?

**LUCIA.** You talk to your mother, don't you?

**TANYA.** No. She sends me a card. I send her a card on her birthday, too. That way there's evidence.

**LUCIA.** I sent Robert a package.

**TANYA.** Then you'll probably get a thank-you note.

**LUCIA.** Or a call.

**TANYA.** Fine.

**LUCIA.** We can order in if you want.

**TANYA.** Here?

**LUCIA.** Yeah. Why not?

*(TANYA settles back in, defeated.)*

**LUCIA.** What happened to you?

**TANYA.** I met the parents of that third grader? The one with the behavioral...

**LUCIA.** The growler?

**TANYA.** Yeah.

**LUCIA.** And?

**TANYA.** White couple, if you can believe it! Educated and middle class as everything. The father's an eye surgeon. Seems they bought themselves a little problem child over in Africa.

**LUCIA.** Great.

**TANYA.** No discipline, no therapy, they're in way over their heads. And the boy—

**LUCIA.** You told them they had to send him to Franklin.

**TANYA.** I did, but...

**LUCIA.** What?

*(TANYA shrugs.)*

**LUCIA.** Tanya! You can't let this become your problem.

**TANYA.** I know.

LUCIA. This kid's behavior is affecting the entire third grade, and you're the one who's going to be accountable if they fail.

TANYA. I know.

LUCIA. What did they say?

TANYA. It happened so fast, it just—I was all ready to stand my ground and they just...bulldozed right over me.

LUCIA. How?

TANYA. I don't even know! I'm in this meeting, and these highly-educated white folks are sitting there across from me, and they're defending this orphan that they've taken into their home, and I start thinking, "Why shouldn't it be my problem, my responsibility? Why is it their problem and not mine?"

LUCIA. Because they adopted him. They're his parents.

TANYA. Right.

LUCIA. You don't think they should be.

TANYA. That's not my place.

LUCIA. But you don't.

TANYA. Do you?

LUCIA. I haven't met them.

TANYA. Do you want to?

LUCIA. What? (*Beat.*) Tanya, no.

TANYA. They asked me to recommend a therapist.

LUCIA. I can't take on any new patients right now. I've told you that!

TANYA. Why not? It's not like you don't have the time.

LUCIA. Please, Tanya.

TANYA. Come on! It's five-thirty on a Tuesday, this should be prime time for you, and there's no one in your office but me.

LUCIA. Five-thirty is when kids eat dinner.

TANYA. You're not busy.

LUCIA. I know.

TANYA. You're sitting here, doing what? (*TANYA gets up to look at Lucia's project.*) Sorting through old photos of your son?

LUCIA. I'm taking out the ones that have Alfred in them.

TANYA. What are you going to do with the Alfred pile?

**LUCIA.** Robert can have them, if he wants. Or he can pass them along to his father, I don't care.

**TANYA.** Good of you.

**LUCIA.** It seemed like a better idea than a photo album full of exed-out faces.

**TANYA.** No, you're more mature than that.

**LUCIA.** I'm trying to deal, okay? My son is in college, I'd like to be able to look at his pictures without seeing Alfred all the time.

**TANYA.** It'll be just like he was immaculately conceived.

**LUCIA.** Stop it.

**TANYA.** What?

**LUCIA.** I know I can't erase him. I have a son, my son has a father. This isn't deliberate amnesia, this is a very reasonable step.

**TANYA.** It's okay, I get it, I'm just—

**LUCIA.** You don't understand what I'm going through.

**TANYA.** I'm trying to help you.

**LUCIA.** But you don't understand. You've never been divorced, you've never even been married. You've never had to watch your kid grow up and leave you. You can't see how big a change this is for me.

**TANYA.** No, I can! What you need to be doing now is taking on more clients! Throw yourself into your work! You'll get through this so much faster.

**LUCIA.** But how am I supposed to help other people when I don't know how to help myself.

**TANYA.** They're kids. It's not the same thing.

**LUCIA.** It's harder. Kids need you to be even stronger than adults do. They need to feel like you're a rock, you're solid, and I'm...

**TANYA.** They're your job.

**LUCIA.** I'm not like you.

**TANYA.** I know.

**LUCIA.** You have to be more patient with me.

**TANYA.** I'm trying.

**LUCIA.** You are?

**TANYA.** I won't make a habit of this, I promise. But I really think you could help this kid.

LUCIA. Tanya—

TANYA. He's eight years old, he's disoriented, scared. You of all people should know what that's like.

LUCIA. Why?

*(TANYA stares at LUCIA.)*

TANYA. It'll be an hour of your time, that's all.

LUCIA. An hour?

TANYA. Unless you decide you want to take him on.

LUCIA. Okay, fine. An hour. But that's it. I'll assess him, and I'll recommend someone else.

TANYA. That's all that I'm asking.

LUCIA. It better be. Because that's all I can do.

TANYA. Okay then.

*(Silence. They both stare at the phone.)*

TANYA. Let's go eat!

LUCIA. I can't.

TANYA. He's not going to call.

LUCIA. How do you know?

*(Beat. TANYA says nothing.)*

LUCIA. You called him.

TANYA. It's not like that.

LUCIA. Oh, what's it like then. He called you?

TANYA. I just wanted to see if he would talk to you.

*(Silence.)*

I was just trying to help.

*(Silence.)*

So what, now you're not talking to me?

*(Silence.)*

Fine, but you'll meet with the kid?

*(Silence.)*

*(Lights. End scene.)*

**Scene 3**

*(James and Rachel's living room. The furniture is temporary, cheap purchases from Target or Ikea. The place is very sparsely decorated, only the essentials.*

RACHEL sits at a table, working on a laptop. JAMES enters. He's coming home from work. RACHEL doesn't look up.)

JAMES. How did it go?

RACHEL. You have to ask?

JAMES. It seems pretty quiet.

RACHEL. He didn't want to leave the park. Threw a two-hour-long tantrum. Finally wore himself out.

JAMES. He's asleep?

*(RACHEL nods.)*

JAMES. It's almost six o'clock. I thought we decided that bedtime was at eight.

RACHEL. We did.

JAMES. If he's going to have an after school nap, that's fine, but he should be awake by now.

RACHEL. There was no "after school" today.

JAMES. We still have to keep him on a schedule.

RACHEL. Let's wake him after we eat.

JAMES. And then what? Then he's up half the night again? I have to work in the morning.

RACHEL. I know.

JAMES. I'm sorry, it's just—Mark is letting me do a canaloplasty. He's finally trusting me to do some actual procedures.

RACHEL. That's great.

JAMES. Yes, it is great. It's really great. So I just need Daniel to sleep tonight. Please.

RACHEL. I can't wave a magic wand and erase his jet lag.

JAMES. But you can help keep him on a schedule. Can't you?

*(Silence. RACHEL closes her laptop.)*

RACHEL. I got a call from the Refugee Family Center this morning.

JAMES. Did they finally give you a start date?

RACHEL. They did.

JAMES. And?

RACHEL. It's never.

JAMES. What?

RACHEL. My start date is never. They took back the offer.

JAMES. Why?

RACHEL. They apparently didn't realize that my masters was from an African university.

JAMES. So?

RACHEL. So it doesn't count for anything, it doesn't exist. It's as if I went to a made-up school. And my practical experience, too: none of it matters. I might as well just be a twenty-two-year-old kid, right out of college. I might as well have walked in there with a high school diploma.

JAMES. This isn't right. This can't be—

RACHEL. Do you want to talk to them?

JAMES. I can, if you want me to. It sounds like someone should.

RACHEL. James.

JAMES. I'm serious. Can't you get Roger to call them? Or write you a letter, at least? Your experience alone should count for—

RACHEL. Roger *has* written me a letter. Everyone and their mother has written me letters. It doesn't matter, it's a company policy. They can't let me work for them until I've been board certified.

JAMES. So you apply for certification.

RACHEL. And to apply for certification I need a degree from an "accredited institution."

JAMES. Rachel...

RACHEL. I don't know what I'm going to do, James. I don't know what I'm supposed to do!

JAMES. You're exhausted.

RACHEL. Of course I'm exhausted! Daniel was up until three in the morning!

JAMES. I know.

RACHEL. I just can't do it. I can't do this. I can't do any of this.

JAMES. It's okay.

**RACHEL.** All I needed today was a minute to myself, to make some phone calls, to try to handle things, and he—

**JAMES.** I know.

**RACHEL.** I need help, James.

**JAMES.** I'm trying, but I—

**RACHEL.** You have work.

**JAMES.** Mark has no sympathy. He says I owe him for taking over the business, for keeping it going. It's like he's punishing me for going away.

**RACHEL.** You said that your family would help. You said that your mother—

**JAMES.** I know, and I'm sorry. I just didn't expect, I couldn't have expected—

**RACHEL.** That she would hate me?

**JAMES.** She doesn't hate you.

**RACHEL.** She does! She hates me. She blames me for keeping you in Africa for so many years, and she resents me for bringing home a child who isn't a perfect little white—

**JAMES.** Are you calling my mother racist?

**RACHEL.** She's just...she's not what I expected.

**JAMES.** I don't think you're what she expected, either.

**RACHEL.** What is that supposed to mean?

**JAMES.** I think, maybe, you intimidate her a little bit.

**RACHEL.** Intimidate her?

**JAMES.** She's never been outside of the country. And here you are this educated, cultured, world traveler...

**RACHEL.** I haven't traveled.

**JAMES.** You've been all over Africa.

**RACHEL.** Just East Africa.

**JAMES.** And England, and Italy. It's really exotic to her. She's never even been to New York City, and that's a seven-hour drive away.

**RACHEL.** I've never been to New York City.

**JAMES.** You have to see things from her perspective.

**RACHEL.** Why? Why can't she see things from my perspective?

**JAMES.** (*Beat.*) Because this is her world.

(*Silence. RACHEL gets up from the table.*)

**RACHEL.** I just thought that maybe we could eat dinner together, before we woke him up. A quiet dinner. Just the two of us.

**JAMES.** But then...

**RACHEL.** Please? Just a little adult conversation. That's all I need.

**JAMES.** Okay.

**RACHEL.** There's a chicken in the refrigerator. I bought one of those pre-roasted chickens that they have at the market.

**JAMES.** Rotisserie.

**RACHEL.** I thought Daniel might like it.

**JAMES.** He's still asking for nyama choma?

**RACHEL.** Yes. I got some maize I can roast as well. No plantains at the store, but every other kind of produce I could think of. It was amazing.

**JAMES.** Maybe you can use your new free time to learn how to cook.

(*RACHEL shoots JAMES a dirty look.*)

**JAMES.** It was a...bad joke.

**RACHEL.** When are we seeing the teacher?

**JAMES.** Tomorrow.

**RACHEL.** Good. That's good.

**JAMES.** And maybe this weekend Daniel and I can do something special together. Go to the zoo or something. Give you a little break.

**RACHEL.** He'd like that.

**JAMES.** Okay then. It's a date. (*Beat.*) We're going to work this out, Rachel. I know the situation right now is not ideal. I know it isn't what I said it would be. But we're going to work this out. I promise.

(*RACHEL doesn't respond.*)

(*Lights.*)

**Scene 4**

*(Ms. Kennedy's classroom. MS. KENNEDY is attempting to hang a clothesline of children's drawings across the room. JAMES enters, ducking under the line.)*

**JAMES.** Ms. Kennedy.

*(Startled, MS. KENNEDY drops the garland, spilling the artwork.)*

**MS. KENNEDY.** Oh! Crap.

**JAMES.** I'm sorry.

**MS. KENNEDY.** Not your fault.

**JAMES.** I'm James.

**MS. KENNEDY.** Doctor Martin. I know.

**JAMES.** You do?

**MS. KENNEDY.** You were supposed to be here at three?

**JAMES.** Yes, I'm sorry. Rachel—my wife—and I had a little mix-up.

**MS. KENNEDY.** It's okay.

**JAMES.** You've really made this place...festive.

**MS. KENNEDY.** It's one of the rules. They check your classroom to make sure that you have at least four of the children's projects displayed at any given time. I ran out of bulletin board space, so... *(She indicates the garland.)*

**JAMES.** That should probably hang a little higher.

**MS. KENNEDY.** I'm...short. I didn't want to stand on a chair.

**JAMES.** Another school rule?

**MS. KENNEDY.** No, I'm just accident prone.

**JAMES.** Okay.

**MS. KENNEDY.** I'm really sorry about what's happened with your... with Daniel. He's such a special kid, really. I really wish I could do more for him.

**JAMES.** So do I.

**MS. KENNEDY.** Okay.

*(JAMES picks up one end of the garland, and starts to help MS. KENNEDY string it.)*

**JAMES.** We got off on a bad foot. With you, with Daniel, with the school.

**MS. KENNEDY.** I tried to get in touch with you.

**JAMES.** And your notes didn't make it home, I know.

**MS. KENNEDY.** He's just, your son, he's so full of energy, you know? So it was out of balance. I'm sure Doctor Baker told you. I've got thirty kids in my classroom, so I can't be everywhere at once.

**JAMES.** Right.

**MS. KENNEDY.** I'm only one person.

**JAMES.** But you're a teacher.

**MS. KENNEDY.** Doctor Baker explained to you the problem we were having. She told me.

**JAMES.** I want to hear it from you.

**MS. KENNEDY.** I'm telling you.

**JAMES.** What you've told me so far is that my son is very energetic, which he is, but that hardly seems like grounds to kick him out of your class.

**MS. KENNEDY.** No, that's not why—

**JAMES.** Then tell me.

**MS. KENNEDY.** Oh...I don't know if I can do that.

**JAMES.** Why not?

**MS. KENNEDY.** I'm a new teacher. I'm just—

**JAMES.** You're afraid to tell me.

**MS. KENNEDY.** I told everything to Doctor Baker.

**JAMES.** And she made the call to take him out of the classroom?

**MS. KENNEDY.** Yes.

**JAMES.** So why don't you just tell me your side of the story.

**MS. KENNEDY.** But I already—

**JAMES.** I just want to hear it from you.

**MS. KENNEDY.** Okay, well, the thing is...I'm trying to cultivate a safe environment, for all of the children. And every time I turn around Daniel's doing something to undermine that. Like he's tearing someone's work off the wall, or coloring on his desk, or, sometimes, he's hiding in the corner, behind the bookshelves and like, growling at people.

**JAMES.** He's not like that all the time.

**MS. KENNEDY.** No.

**JAMES.** He has good days.

**MS. KENNEDY.** But you know what I'm talking about, don't you?

**JAMES.** I do.

**MS. KENNEDY.** It's like he gets into these moods, and if you come anywhere near him he just, it's like this other person comes out. This deep whispering voice, and he says things—

**JAMES.** To try to keep you away,

**MS. KENNEDY.** Yes.

**JAMES.** And what do you do?

**MS. KENNEDY.** What can I do?

**JAMES.** I don't know, that's why I'm asking.

**MS. KENNEDY.** But that's what I'm saying! I don't know what to do with him! I don't know if it's ADD or ADHD or autism or what, but I told Doctor Baker and she said that Daniel doesn't belong in a regular stream classroom. Not the way he is now, not without being medicated or something.

**JAMES.** Medicated?

**MS. KENNEDY.** I don't know! I don't know what to do with him, that's what I'm saying! So Doctor Baker said she would take care of it because she wants me to succeed. And I want to succeed! Being a teacher is all I've ever wanted, ever since I can remember. But I keep having these days where I'm like, "If this is what it's going to be like all the time then I don't think I'm good enough to do this!" Have you ever had one of those days?

**JAMES.** It's PTSD.

**MS. KENNEDY.** What is?

**JAMES.** What's wrong with my son. He's not autistic, he has Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

**MS. KENNEDY.** Something happened to him?

**JAMES.** He lost his entire family.

**MS. KENNEDY.** Sure, that's why you adopted him.

**JAMES.** It's not as easy as that. He saw things.

**MS. KENNEDY.** Like what?

**JAMES.** I really don't like to talk about it. I don't like to use his past to get him special treatment.

**MS. KENNEDY.** But then how can you expect people to understand?

**JAMES.** I guess... I can't.

**MS. KENNEDY.** So tell me.

**JAMES.** You're sure?

**MS. KENNEDY.** I can take it.

**JAMES.** Daniel's parents—Daniel's father was never in the picture. His mother, she died of AIDS when he was three years old. She was a patient at the clinic where Rachel and I were working, that's how we met the family.

**MS. KENNEDY.** Oh...and Daniel—

**JAMES.** He's negative, thankfully.

**MS. KENNEDY.** So you took him in.

**JAMES.** No, not even. Rachel and I had just gotten married then, so the thought of adopting a child didn't even occur to us.

We let Daniel go back to his village, and he and his other siblings lived with an older sister. We got reports back on their progress, Daniel was doing fine. Rachel sometimes organized for food and clothes and things to be brought to the house and others like it in the village. We raised money to make sure that their school fees were paid. We thought that was better than breaking up the family, you know, taking them out of their culture. Let the older ones take care of the younger ones. Seems to be working in lots of parts of Africa.

**MS. KENNEDY.** Okay.

**JAMES.** But the situation—you know how unstable it is over there. Uganda's a land-locked country, surrounded on all sides by these different civil wars. Wars that need troops, that need new bodies to keep them going. So there are these groups, they come into the village at night, they kidnap the children, brainwash them, and turn them into killers. Sometimes they even send them back to their villages to murder their own families.

**MS. KENNEDY.** So you're saying Daniel was kidnapped and brainwashed?

**JAMES.** No.

**MS. KENNEDY.** Okay.

**JAMES.** Two of his brothers were. One sister. At least, we think. His oldest sister, the caretaker, died trying to defend them. Daniel was so small, his sister hid him inside a flour sack. For three days

he stayed there, breathing through the burlap weave, watching her body get swarmed by flies on the kitchen floor.

**MS. KENNEDY.** Daniel told you all of this?

**JAMES.** No. Rachel found him. She was bringing supplies to the family. She found the body, found Daniel, huddled in that flour sack, stinking, of course, almost rotted through after three days. Six years old. But when she brought him home you would have thought he was three, he was so small.

**MS. KENNEDY.** So you took him in.

**JAMES.** We did.

**MS. KENNEDY.** That's incredible.

**JAMES.** He's come a long way in the past two years. Before we left Uganda he seemed like a normal kid. He went to school, made friends, drew pictures, played soccer. He got into a fight from time to time, but for the most part he was a good kid. And we thought maybe if we gave him a fresh start, here, he would really thrive.

**MS. KENNEDY.** It's amazing.

**JAMES.** What is?

**MS. KENNEDY.** I just think it's so beautiful, what you've done for him.

**JAMES.** Thank you.

**MS. KENNEDY.** I almost joined the Peace Corps two years ago, but my father wouldn't let me. He said he would pay for teachers' college if I would agree to stay.

**JAMES.** My family wasn't too excited when I went over there, either.

**MS. KENNEDY.** It's just...it's so awful. What they go through. I mean that story, it just makes me feel...

**JAMES.** Yeah.

**MS. KENNEDY.** Helpless.

**JAMES.** But you're not.

**MS. KENNEDY.** No?

**JAMES.** You can help Daniel. You can help us to help him.

**MS. KENNEDY.** I—

**JAMES.** It's the move that's causing this behavior in him, I know it is. So the last thing he needs now is another change! But if you kick him out of your classroom they're going to make us bus him twenty

miles away to go to a special school. Do you really think that would be good for him?

**MS. KENNEDY.** No.

**JAMES.** Neither do I.

**MS. KENNEDY.** Yeah.

**JAMES.** We need Daniel to stay in this school, we need to make this work, if we're going to be any kind of parents for him. Do you understand?

**MS. KENNEDY.** I do, but—

**JAMES.** This behavior is temporary. It's going to get back under control, and soon, I swear.

**MS. KENNEDY.** But in the meantime...?

*(JAMES produces a card.)*

**JAMES.** We live five minutes away. My wife is still looking for a job. You can call her if something goes wrong.

**MS. KENNEDY.** But I don't know her.

**JAMES.** If you don't want to call her, call me. I don't work too far away, either.

**MS. KENNEDY.** Don't you have patients?

**JAMES.** Not many. It takes a while to build a practice.

**MS. KENNEDY.** I don't know...

**JAMES.** Please. I'm sorry you didn't get the whole story before, it was...foolish of me. But now you know. Daniel needs this classroom. He needs to have a normal life. He needs someone who understands.

**MS. KENNEDY.** But Doctor Baker—

**JAMES.** She told me it was your call.

**MS. KENNEDY.** She did.

**JAMES.** Yes.

**MS. KENNEDY.** Oh.

**JAMES.** So what do you say?

*(Lights.)*

**Scene 5**

*(Rachel's living room. RACHEL and LUCIA sit with teacups.)*

**RACHEL.** I really appreciate you coming by.

**LUCIA.** You do?

**RACHEL.** How's the tea?

**LUCIA.** It's fine. I'm not much of a—

**RACHEL.** Oh. Yeah. I remember that about Americans. Do you want coffee?

**LUCIA.** I'm not much of a hot beverage kind of person.

**RACHEL.** Oh. *(Beat.)* They should be back soon.

**LUCIA.** You think?

**RACHEL.** Sure.

*(Pause.)*

I shipped a bunch of tea over from Uganda, but it hasn't gotten here yet. Sea freight. You know how it is.

**LUCIA.** Not really.

**RACHEL.** We had a shipping allotment, with James' job? Half a container. But it's gotten held up in New Jersey, some issue with the customs forms.

**LUCIA.** Right.

**RACHEL.** The tea you get here just isn't the same. It's not as...rich? African tea is strong like coffee. Then we fill it with milk and sugar...I have really beautiful mugs, in the shipment, too. My mother has a glass-blowing studio on our farm, in Kenya. She makes all these amazing creations. Vases mostly, for the flowers.

**LUCIA.** What...flowers?

**RACHEL.** My parents have a flower plantation.

**LUCIA.** Oh. They've been living there for a while.

**RACHEL.** My father was born there, my mother moved after University. She was Italian. But they both—we're all Kenyan now.

**LUCIA.** I guess I didn't realize—

**RACHEL.** I know. Most people don't get that here. Everyone thinks that I'm just American, and I'm putting on an accent.

LUCIA. I didn't think you were American. But I think I would have guessed you were Australian or something.

RACHEL. See? It's very annoying. But you must know about that.

LUCIA. Why?

RACHEL. Where are you from?

LUCIA. El Paso.

RACHEL. See? Where's that?

LUCIA. Texas.

RACHEL. Oh. I don't know American geography very well.

LUCIA. My parents were from Honduras. But I've lived in America since I was eight years old.

RACHEL. Just like Daniel! I mean, if James gets his way.

LUCIA. What way is that?

RACHEL. If we stay here, if he grows up here. An American boy.

LUCIA. You don't want that?

RACHEL. I didn't say that.

LUCIA. Do you want to talk about it?

RACHEL. What was it like, for you?

LUCIA. What was what like?

RACHEL. Moving from Honduras, when you were eight.

LUCIA. Why do you want to know?

RACHEL. I was just making conversation.

LUCIA. My family was pretty well off. I went to private school in Honduras and then I went to private school in El Paso. There was a language difference, but lots of kids spoke Spanish in El Paso, so I adjusted. Kids are very adaptable.

RACHEL. Daniel speaks three languages.

LUCIA. Okay.

RACHEL. English, of course. Acholi, that's his native tongue, and Swahili. That's what I speak with him, or I try to. James hates it when I do, says it confuses him. I think it just confuses James. His Swahili isn't very good, and sometimes Daniel comes up and starts shouting all kinds of things at him and James just doesn't understand. (*She laughs.*) Neither of us speaks much Acholi. He's losing that.

**LUCIA.** That's too bad.

**RACHEL.** (*Shrugs.*) What are you going to do? If he's going to be an American Boy he should really only speak English, right?

**LUCIA.** No, there's lots of—

**RACHEL.** I meant that as a joke.

**LUCIA.** Okay.

(*Pause. LUCIA looks at the door.*)

**RACHEL.** I'm really sorry about all of this. I hope you don't think badly of us.

**LUCIA.** I don't...actually know what's going on here.

**RACHEL.** What do you mean?

**LUCIA.** You were expecting me.

**RACHEL.** Yes.

**LUCIA.** But you let your husband take Daniel to the zoo.

**RACHEL.** I didn't remember until later.

**LUCIA.** But then why didn't you call him?

**RACHEL.** How?

**LUCIA.** On his...cell phone?

**RACHEL.** Oh. Right. I guess I could have done that. I could do that now, if you...

(*RACHEL goes to the phone.*)

**LUCIA.** No, don't. By the time they get back here...I only scheduled an hour for this.

(*LUCIA tries to suss out the situation.*)

**RACHEL.** So what do you—

**LUCIA.** You wanted to meet me alone first. You wanted to get a chance to what, to vet me?

**RACHEL.** No!

**LUCIA.** You're not comfortable having your son enter therapy?

**RACHEL.** Everything's so new to me here. I just want to take things slowly.

**LUCIA.** But Daniel's problems are fairly...pressing, don't you think?

**RACHEL.** His problems in school?

**LUCIA.** Doctor Baker told me that you wanted to get help for your son. She asked me to assess his needs, to see whether he's fit to return to the classroom. Isn't that something you want to happen?

**RACHEL.** But they've already agreed to take him back.

**LUCIA.** Who has?

**RACHEL.** James went in and talked to the teacher. She said Daniel can start back on Monday.

**LUCIA.** (*Pause.*) Do you think that's wise?

**RACHEL.** I think it's necessary.

**LUCIA.** For Daniel?

**RACHEL.** Who else?

(*LUCIA begins to pack up her things.*)

**LUCIA.** So it was your husband, then?

**RACHEL.** What do you mean?

**LUCIA.** Since he's straightened things out with the teacher. He's afraid to have his son assessed. He doesn't want me to recommend anything to contradict what he's already decided.

**RACHEL.** It feels like you're assessing me.

**LUCIA.** I'm just trying to figure out what happened here.

**RACHEL.** You're trying to diagnose me. You've been doing it ever since you walked in that door. You didn't just come here to see Daniel. You wanted to see me, too.

**LUCIA.** And James.

**RACHEL.** You want to evaluate our abilities as parents.

**LUCIA.** I was asked to assess the situation.

**RACHEL.** And then you'll report back to Doctor Baker everything that we've talked about.

**LUCIA.** I'm not going to do that Ms. Martin.

**RACHEL.** Wall.

**LUCIA.** What?

**RACHEL.** Wall. I kept my name.

**LUCIA.** Ms. Wall. You can trust me.

**RACHEL.** I can?

**LUCIA.** I agreed to this visit as a favor to a friend. And it seems to me that you need my help more than I need anything from you. So if you don't want me here...

*(LUCIA heads to the door.)*

**RACHEL.** James thinks that I should be able to work with Daniel.

**LUCIA.** How?

**RACHEL.** I have a masters in occupational therapy. I did all my hours and five years in the field, in Uganda, working with people who were disabled by the war.

**LUCIA.** That's not the same thing.

**RACHEL.** I know. And even if it were...it looks like it's all meaningless here, anyway. My certifications aren't going to transfer. I'm going to have to go back to school, start all over.

**LUCIA.** I'm sorry.

**RACHEL.** I know Daniel needs help. I just...I slept in this morning. James took him without telling me.

**LUCIA.** It sounds like you're going through a tough time.

**RACHEL.** Do you think Daniel would be better off in a special school?

**LUCIA.** I haven't met him yet.

**RACHEL.** I'm sorry about this. I really am.

**LUCIA.** Why don't you bring Daniel by on Monday? 4 PM.

**RACHEL.** Okay.

**LUCIA.** We can talk then. All three of us, if you'd like.

*(Lights.)*

## Scene 6

*(TANYA enters the classroom, where MS. KENNEDY is cleaning up her room, which is a total mess.)*

**TANYA.** Ms. Kennedy.

**MS. KENNEDY.** Oh! Doctor Baker. You scared me.

**TANYA.** I'm sorry. I didn't know you'd be on edge.

**MS. KENNEDY.** It's just...lunch time. Quiet time.

**TANYA.** I looked for you in the teacher's lounge.

**MS. KENNEDY.** I needed to get my classroom in order.

**TANYA.** You don't have to be afraid of them.

**MS. KENNEDY.** Who?

**TANYA.** The other teachers.

**MS. KENNEDY.** I'm not.

**TANYA.** I saw that Daniel Martin was in the nurse's office.

**MS. KENNEDY.** I called his father.

**TANYA.** Is everything all right?

**MS. KENNEDY.** I don't know. His father's nurse—you know he's a doctor? She said that he was in with a patient, and asked me whether it was an emergency. And I said it wasn't an emergency. So I'm sure he'll get here when he can.

**TANYA.** I meant with Daniel.

**MS. KENNEDY.** Oh. Yeah, he's fine.

*(TANYA takes in the mess of the room.)*

**TANYA.** What happened?

**MS. KENNEDY.** It was nothing, really. He fell asleep in the middle of the history lesson, so... I thought he was better off napping in there.

**TANYA.** The nurse said she had to come get him.

**MS. KENNEDY.** Yeah. Well, while he was sleeping he had a nightmare. I think. He started...barking?

**TANYA.** Was he barking or wasn't he?

**MS. KENNEDY.** Maybe it was more like shouting. I didn't know if it was maybe one of those African languages that he speaks? And then it turned into almost like a gurgling noise like he was...drowning?

**TANYA.** That doesn't sound "fine."

**MS. KENNEDY.** It wasn't really a big deal except that Phillip Diaz had just learned about rabies, so he announced to the class that that was what was wrong with Daniel, started screaming "He has rabies, he has rabies!" And then all the kids ran to the other side of the classroom. It was a bit of a...a mess. That's why I had to call the nurse here, instead of sending Daniel by himself.

**TANYA.** But it's all right now?

**MS. KENNEDY.** He's with the nurse.

**TANYA.** And what are you going to tell the rest of the class?

**MS. KENNEDY.** I told them that Daniel is getting rabies shots today and that he'll be better tomorrow.

**TANYA.** And what if he behaves like this again tomorrow?

**MS. KENNEDY.** More rabies shots?

**TANYA.** It's better not to indulge their fantasies. Give the kids a straight answer when they ask you, kids can usually handle it.

**MS. KENNEDY.** Really? You think I should tell the class how Daniel's mother died of AIDS and his brothers and sisters were all kidnapped except for the one who was murdered in front of him? Because honestly, I had a hard time handling all that.

**TANYA.** I hadn't heard the whole story.

**MS. KENNEDY.** I just, I feel like someone has to give Daniel a break, you know?

**TANYA.** I do, but you can't let the fact that you feel bad for him cause you to cover for him. He's a very troubled child, we have a responsibility to help him.

**MS. KENNEDY.** I'm trying to help him.

**TANYA.** I need you to take care of your whole class.

**MS. KENNEDY.** That's what I'm trying to do! But thirty kids is...

**TANYA.** Unreasonable. I know.

**MS. KENNEDY.** How is anyone supposed to handle thirty kids at the same time? I mean, seriously? Thirty little people with thirty little problems.

**TANYA.** You have to stop thinking of them that way.

**MS. KENNEDY.** What do you mean?

**TANYA.** You know what a group organism is? One creature that's made up of a bunch of smaller creatures?

**MS. KENNEDY.** Like Voltron?

**TANYA.** Right. Well, that's how you have to think of your class. Like...Voltron. Or like a bee hive.

**MS. KENNEDY.** And I'm what, I'm the Queen?

**TANYA.** Exactly.

**MS. KENNEDY.** But I don't want the kids to serve me.

**TANYA.** You want them to do what you say.

**MS. KENNEDY.** I want them to explore, to learn to be themselves.

**TANYA.** But they don't learn anything unless they have a strong leader. That's how these organisms work.

**MS. KENNEDY.** Okay.

**TANYA.** You've got to be more confident.

**MS. KENNEDY.** I'm confident.

**TANYA.** Then you've got to show me that. Stand up straight. Head up, shoulders back. (*TANYA demonstrates.*) If I can see it in you, the kids will be able to, too.

**MS. KENNEDY.** The kids are eight.

**TANYA.** Eight-year-olds are remarkably perceptive.

**MS. KENNEDY.** Okay. (*She sits up straight.*) Is there anything else?

**TANYA.** What do you mean?

**MS. KENNEDY.** Do you have any other advice? That you want to share with me?

**TANYA.** I was just saying that in general.

**MS. KENNEDY.** But I'm asking: is there anything else that can help me in the classroom? Like, should I be wearing a whistle around my neck, or some kind of shiny broach on my lapel? Would that make me...a better teacher?

**TANYA.** You're mocking me.

**MS. KENNEDY.** No! I'm being serious. I'm...trying. I love these kids, I really do. And I want to reach them, but right now...

**TANYA.** Mr. Lyons wears a whistle because he's the gym teacher and Mrs. Woyawata wears the tacky broach because she teaches music and that's what music teachers do. I think they must issue them at the college.

**MS. KENNEDY.** Right.

**TANYA.** I would think about the shoes, though. Maybe get something with a little heel on it.

**MS. KENNEDY.** But I'm on my feet most of the day.

**TANYA.** Do you want my advice?

**MS. KENNEDY.** Yes.

**TANYA.** Heels force you to stand up a little straighter. Get some that make a nice sharp sound on the floor. You ever hear me coming down the hall?

**MS. KENNEDY.** Yes.

**TANYA.** And what happens to the kids when they hear me coming?

**MS. KENNEDY.** They...sit up in their chairs, they stop side-talking...

**TANYA.** Uh huh.

**MS. KENNEDY.** You're saying that's because of the shoes?

**TANYA.** Maybe.

**MS. KENNEDY.** I think it's because you're the principal. That word, it's so big.

**TANYA.** Teacher can be a big word, too.

**MS. KENNEDY.** Yeah?

**TANYA.** But you have to make it one.

**MS. KENNEDY.** Okay.

**TANYA.** Testing is only four months away. You've got to get this class together, now. You can't let this one kid hold the whole grade—the whole school—back.

**MS. KENNEDY.** I'm not!

**TANYA.** Yet. But it's a slippery slope. Put your guard up. You start to feel too much, you start to care too much about any one kid...it'll come back to bite you, that's all I'm saying.

*(TANYA turns and exits the classroom. MS. KENNEDY sits in a small chair and examines her shoes.)*

## Scene 7

*(Lucia's office. LUCIA sits at her desk, going through a pile of old photos. RACHEL knocks on the door. She balances a muffin and two coffees in her hands.)*

**RACHEL.** Hello. Lucia?

*(LUCIA quickly tries to hide her photos.)*

**LUCIA.** Did we have a—

**RACHEL.** No, I was just in the neighborhood. There was no one at the desk—

**LUCIA.** She's on her lunch break. The girl.

**RACHEL.** I brought you a muffin.

LUCIA. That's very...sweet, thank you.

(LUCIA looks at RACHEL, still holding the two coffees.)

RACHEL. Coffee?

LUCIA. I'm not much of a...

RACHEL. Hot beverage person. That's right. Well...let it get cold.

(RACHEL puts the coffee next to the muffin on Lucia's desk. They stand untouched.)

RACHEL. There's something I wanted to talk with you about. We never get to chat, when I drop Daniel off, so today I was just out driving, and I thought—

LUCIA. He seems to be making progress.

RACHEL. Does he?

LUCIA. He's started talking pretty freely with me. Opening up. Not like the first time.

RACHEL. I'm sorry about that.

LUCIA. Nothing I hadn't seen before.

RACHEL. Really?

LUCIA. Well, every kid is a little bit different.

RACHEL. He calls your sessions storytime.

LUCIA. His stories mostly involve animals so far. I'm still looking to find the people in them. There's a dog that he—

RACHEL. Taka Taka.

LUCIA. He tells me about his adventures with Taka.

RACHEL. It means garbage.

LUCIA. What?

RACHEL. Taka taka. It was this stray dog that he befriended in our town. It went around scavenging. Mangy. Most people wouldn't go near it, but Daniel, he loved that dog. We couldn't stop him from petting it.

LUCIA. He seems upset that Taka couldn't come to America with him.

RACHEL. Taka was put down.

LUCIA. Oh.

**RACHEL.** Drowned, actually. A few days before we left. Some local policemen. He stole their dinner, so they...

**LUCIA.** That's awful, does Daniel...?

**RACHEL.** No! He would have had to say goodbye anyway, so we decided to just...you know, tell him Taka found a home.

**LUCIA.** In most of his stories he's a dog, too. He seems to relate. To the stray.

**RACHEL.** Well, it's sort of...his story, too, isn't it? He was a bit of a stray animal when we found him.

**LUCIA.** But he's a...person.

**RACHEL.** Oh God! I didn't mean to—that sounded racist, didn't it?

**LUCIA.** A little bit.

**RACHEL.** I didn't mean to—it's just how it all happened. He sort of showed up on our doorstep and we started feeding him, until he was ours.

**LUCIA.** I see.

**RACHEL.** That made it sound worse? I didn't mean...you have to understand the context. Where I grew up, on the farm, we employed a lot of people, and there were kids who would just show up sometimes, kids who were too young to work. My mother would feed them. She was always getting extra sacks of maize and flour and going down to the used clothing market, making sure that everyone was taken care of. And it was like...eventually the orphans would just get absorbed by the community.

**LUCIA.** But I thought you found Daniel.

**RACHEL.** I did! And when I brought him back to the clinic I figured that someone...I didn't figure it would be us. But James got this idea in his head. He really loved his childhood, here, and he wanted to give that to someone, he can be a really generous man. Naive, maybe. But he just, he wanted to do this for Daniel.

**LUCIA.** And Daniel?

**RACHEL.** Well, it's a pretty good deal, isn't it?

**LUCIA.** For who?

**RACHEL.** Everyone?

**LUCIA.** Including you?

**RACHEL.** I suppose.

**LUCIA.** Do you want to talk about it?

**RACHEL.** It's not really why I came here today.

**LUCIA.** Because we can talk about Daniel or we can talk about you, but to me it seems it's all a part of the same—

**RACHEL.** I mean I do want to talk about me in a—

**LUCIA.** And James, too, of course. Your relationship with your husband has a big impact on Daniel's—

**RACHEL.** My relationship with my husband is fine!

**LUCIA.** Okay.

**RACHEL.** I came here to see if you can help me find a job.

**LUCIA.** Oh.

**RACHEL.** Not with you, necessarily, but with one of your colleagues? I was thinking, if I can't practice in the United States I can at least get out of the house, get involved. I could answer phones, get coffee, file. Don't need certifications to do those things.

**LUCIA.** Don't you think that Daniel should be your focus right now?

**RACHEL.** But I could work while he's in school.

**LUCIA.** Most of my clients come in after school.

**RACHEL.** Right.

**LUCIA.** If you need something to do, you could volunteer in Daniel's classroom. They're always eager to have parents come in, help out.

**RACHEL.** You don't get it.

**LUCIA.** What don't I get?

**RACHEL.** I'm already spending most of my time with Daniel, thinking about Daniel. The last thing I need is to spend more time that way. I need something to take me out of it.

**LUCIA.** Don't you think Daniel needs you right now?

**RACHEL.** And mothers are just supposed to give up all their own needs for their children?

**LUCIA.** No. Lots of women find the balance between successful careers and highly functioning children. But Daniel is not a functioning child right now. So what I'm asking is, what if you, just for the moment, make Daniel your project?

**RACHEL.** I don't know if that's the best use of my skills.

**LUCIA.** Why not?

**RACHEL.** I mean my training, I've mostly worked with people with physical disabilities, not psychological.

**LUCIA.** There is an overlap.

**RACHEL.** But it just seems like it would be a waste! All these goals my entire life, all this education, and then to just...stop? Just to be a mother?

**LUCIA.** Being a mother is not a small thing!

**RACHEL.** I know, but—I just feel like, is this what I did all that other stuff for?

**LUCIA.** No, but it's—

**RACHEL.** And I just think—this isn't what I signed up for, when we adopted him.

**LUCIA.** You thought it would be just like taking in a puppy?

**RACHEL.** No, but it was different over there. We had so much help. We had a cook, and a housekeeper, and there were so many other kids around... I didn't really have to think about it all that much, he was taken care of, you know? Everything was easier to balance.

**LUCIA.** Do you think it was easier for Daniel?

**RACHEL.** If his behavior is any indication.

**LUCIA.** But his life up until now has been a horror. Don't you think it was a good choice to give him a fresh start?

**RACHEL.** I don't know! It just feels like everything we do that's supposed to be "for" him ends up causing him trauma!

**LUCIA.** Change is always traumatic, but that isn't...that isn't a reason to let things stay the same bad way. If things are bad, I mean, if the status quo is bad, sometimes, you have to—

**RACHEL.** But Daniel didn't even know things were bad! It was the only life he knew!

**LUCIA.** But I'm saying—that doesn't make it a good life! I mean, if you and your husband knew you could do better, didn't you have a responsibility to do that?

**RACHEL.** Even if it means sacrificing my own happiness?

**LUCIA.** Maybe.

**RACHEL.** I don't know if I'm ready to do that.

**LUCIA.** But it's too late. You're already a parent.

**RACHEL.** (*Beat.*) Were you ready?

LUCIA. What?

RACHEL. He's yours, isn't he? The pictures on your desk?

LUCIA. Yes.

(LUCIA scoops up the photos and puts them in her desk.)

RACHEL. You must have been young.

LUCIA. I was twenty-two.

RACHEL. Wow.

LUCIA. I got pregnant, I got married, and, you know, I dealt with it. Put my life on hold.

RACHEL. And now?

LUCIA. My kid's in college, my husband is gone...

RACHEL. Oh. I'm sorry.

LUCIA. I shouldn't have told you that.

RACHEL. We're not in a session.

LUCIA. I know, but, *(Beat.)* I just kicked him out a few months ago. It's still...new.

RACHEL. And did it make things better?

LUCIA. What do you mean?

RACHEL. Changing the bad situation.

LUCIA. I think I'm still in the traumatic part.

RACHEL. What did he do?

LUCIA. He was unfaithful to me for years, I always knew about it, but I forgave it, or ignored it, for my son.

RACHEL. I don't know if I could...

LUCIA. But then after Robert left for college, I was in the kitchen one day, cooking dinner. Cooking chicken or something. And I looked over at Alfred in the living room, sitting in his chair, and I...I couldn't remember how I had gotten there.

RACHEL. That's how I feel.

LUCIA. I'm forty-three years old, and this is supposed to be the rest of my life? So I just asked him to go. He left that night, moved in with his girlfriend. I got the house. It's a little emptier now, but—

RACHEL. How do you keep going?

LUCIA. I love my son.

RACHEL. But he's gone.

LUCIA. Yeah, well. I love my job, too. Or I'm supposed to. (*Beat.*) I will again.

RACHEL. I'm jealous.

LUCIA. Of me?

RACHEL. Yeah.

LUCIA. That's the strangest thing anyone's ever said to me.

RACHEL. I told you people don't realize how different I am.

LUCIA. Right.

RACHEL. I mean it, though.

LUCIA. (*Beat.*) Maybe you should talk to someone else.

RACHEL. Am I...? I'm imposing here. I'm sorry.

LUCIA. No, I'm just. Clearly I'm not in a good place to help you. I'm supposed to be listening and I manage to make it all about me.

RACHEL. It's nice to hear what somebody else is going through. Most days, I feel like I'm spinning. And the biggest thing I think I need is, I guess, a friend. That sounds silly. You have lots of friends. I just—

LUCIA. No, I don't.

RACHEL. What?

LUCIA. I don't have lots of friends. I really only had one, good friend, and she's—

*(A cell phone starts to ring, quietly. RACHEL looks in her purse.)*

RACHEL. Oh, I'm so sorry, it's—

*(RACHEL pulls out her phone.)*

Not me.

LUCIA. Oh.

*(LUCIA looks in her purse. The ringing gets louder.)*

Speak of the devil. That's her.

*(LUCIA silences the phone.)*

RACHEL. You can get it.

LUCIA. No, that's fine. We're not really—

*(The phone on Lucia's desk starts to ring.)*

LUCIA. I'm really sorry.

RACHEL. Get it.

LUCIA. I don't need to.

RACHEL. But what if it's a—

*(Rachel's cell phone starts to ring.)*

That's James.

LUCIA. Go ahead.

RACHEL. *(Picking up her phone:)* Hello?

LUCIA. *(Picking up the phone:)* Hello?

RACHEL. What's going on?

LUCIA. What happened?

RACHEL. Wait, slow down.

LUCIA. I've got it.

RACHEL. Oh. No.

LUCIA. Okay.

RACHEL. I'll...

LUCIA. We'll be right there.

*(RACHEL and LUCIA hang up and look at each other. Lights.)*

*End of Act I*



## ACT II

### Scene 1

(MS. KENNEDY *in the classroom. She has a bandage loosely wrapped around her forearm, and she's badly shaken. JAMES enters.*)

**JAMES.** There you are.

**MS. KENNEDY.** Please, don't—

**JAMES.** They're all looking for you.

**MS. KENNEDY.** Don't come closer to me.

**JAMES.** Please. Someone needs to take a look at that. (*He steps closer to her.*)

**MS. KENNEDY.** The nurse—

**JAMES.** I'm a doctor.

(*JAMES reaches for MS. KENNEDY's hand, she pulls back.*)

**MS. KENNEDY.** She says that I might need stitches.

**JAMES.** Then we should get them.

**MS. KENNEDY.** I don't want to go to the hospital.

**JAMES.** That's okay.

**MS. KENNEDY.** I hate hospitals. I—

**JAMES.** No one's going to make you go to the hospital if you don't want to.

**MS. KENNEDY.** The kids think I should get rabies shots. But the nurse says that it's really expensive. You have to like, prove that you've been exposed.

**JAMES.** You know that Daniel doesn't actually have rabies.

**MS. KENNEDY.** Yeah.

**JAMES.** But you should probably get a tetanus shot.

**MS. KENNEDY.** I thought that was for rusty nails.

**JAMES.** It's always good to get one. If yours is out of date.

**MS. KENNEDY.** How long are they good for?

**JAMES.** Ten years?

**MS. KENNEDY.** Then I need one... (*Begins to panic.*)

**JAMES.** We can call your regular doctor. He can do the stitches and the tetanus shot. Do you have a regular doctor?

**MS. KENNEDY.** No, no, I just switched insurance, I don't know—

**JAMES.** We'll get you one. Okay? Now let me see.

*(JAMES takes MS. KENNEDY's arm, he opens up the bandage. She lets him. He exposes a large bloody bite.)*

**JAMES.** It doesn't look so bad.

**MS. KENNEDY.** He bit my arm open!

**JAMES.** I know, I'm just saying. The bleeding seems to have stopped.

**MS. KENNEDY.** Okay.

**JAMES.** I'm really sorry about this.

**MS. KENNEDY.** You can see his little tooth marks.

**JAMES.** I never imagined that something like this could happen.

**MS. KENNEDY.** Well I did!

**JAMES.** What do you mean?

**MS. KENNEDY.** I told you. At the beginning.

**JAMES.** But he's been doing so much better, hasn't he?

**MS. KENNEDY.** Yes.

**JAMES.** You have really delicate-looking skin.

*(MS. KENNEDY pulls back her arm and quickly reties the bandage.)*

**MS. KENNEDY.** I don't know.

*(Long silence.)*

**JAMES.** I'd like you to... I know this is hard, but I'd like for you to tell me what happened.

**MS. KENNEDY.** I need to go to the doctor.

**JAMES.** It's not a big rush.

**MS. KENNEDY.** I just came back here to get a minute alone, okay? I need to collect my thoughts before I...

**JAMES.** The doctor will ask you the same questions.

**MS. KENNEDY.** I know! But I...

**JAMES.** No one is saying this is your fault.

**MS. KENNEDY.** Of course it's not my fault! Of course no one's saying that!

**JAMES.** I just wanted to make sure that was clear.

**MS. KENNEDY.** Well it was!

**JAMES.** Just tell me what happened. I want to think about it with you.

**MS. KENNEDY.** I don't know if I can do that.

**JAMES.** (*Picking up a piece of construction paper:*) You were doing arts and crafts?

**MS. KENNEDY.** We were doing math. Geometry.

**JAMES.** Okay.

**MS. KENNEDY.** It was a lesson about shapes. Triangles, circles, squares, parallelograms, rhombus—rhombi?

**JAMES.** I think it's rhombuses.

**MS. KENNEDY.** They had to measure them, cut them out, glue them to the worksheet. I gave them all different colored construction paper so that it would be pretty, you know, and I could hang them on the bulletin board. A couple of them got done.

**JAMES.** Can I see?

(*MS. KENNEDY pulls out a few sheets of white paper with construction paper shapes glued to them.*)

**JAMES.** Very pretty.

**MS. KENNEDY.** I thought so.

**JAMES.** And Daniel...?

**MS. KENNEDY.** Daniel was working at his special table, like we... like we arranged. He had a pair of safety scissors, a pencil and a ruler, and he was measuring away. He was working hard.

**JAMES.** That's wonderful.

**MS. KENNEDY.** And I was just thinking, about how well he was doing. But I didn't give him a compass.

**JAMES.** Why would he need...?

**MS. KENNEDY.** A—you know a circle-drawing compass? Where you put the pencil in one side, and the other side is...well, it's pretty sharp, isn't it? And I didn't think...I didn't give one to Daniel.

**JAMES.** Why not?

**MS. KENNEDY.** I didn't think he would notice. I mean, he was over there at his special table, I didn't think he would even care.

**JAMES.** He's very meticulous about his drawing.

**MS. KENNEDY.** But this was a *math* lesson, this wasn't drawing! So I just—I said, "I'm sorry Daniel, there weren't enough to go around." But then Jason Nedlin, who can be a bit of a challenge himself, he picked up that I hadn't give Daniel a compass on purpose. Started calling out to him, teasing him, saying that Daniel wasn't allowed to have the compass, he was too much of a baby.

**JAMES.** That little...

**MS. KENNEDY.** Jason gets picked on himself, it's what they do. You have to understand these kids. So I had to quiet Jason down, but meanwhile everyone's picked up on it, and Daniel's turning red in the face.

**JAMES.** And you didn't—

**MS. KENNEDY.** For a second he's just quiet, but he looks like he's going to pop! And then he starts tearing up his construction paper. Like maniacally, into tiny little pieces.

**JAMES.** I wish you'd called me.

**MS. KENNEDY.** And he starts screaming that he wants a compass! Give him a compass! I go over to his table to try to calm him down, and he starts hitting me with his little fists.

**JAMES.** And you—

**MS. KENNEDY.** It didn't really hurt, but it made me step back. And before I could, you know, calm him, he's halfway across the room. Throwing the paper into Jason's face.

**JAMES.** Oh—

**MS. KENNEDY.** Jason gets up from his chair and pushes Daniel to the ground. Starts kicking him.

**JAMES.** Jesus.

**MS. KENNEDY.** By this time I'm over there, or I'm on my way over, but it's hard to run across the room in these...shoes.

**JAMES.** I like those shoes.

**MS. KENNEDY.** They're...new. But they're hard to run in. So I'm two desks away and I realize—he's going for the compass. Daniel's going for Jason's compass.

**JAMES.** That makes sense.

**MS. KENNEDY.** And I know you said not to touch him when he gets like that, it just makes it worse when you touch him, but there was nothing I could do. He would have poked Jason's eye out.

**JAMES.** You don't know that.

**MS. KENNEDY.** If he'd gotten a hold of that compass, I swear he would have stabbed that boy.

**JAMES.** He would never do something like that!

**MS. KENNEDY.** He bit me!

**JAMES.** When you touched him.

**MS. KENNEDY.** I was trying to hold him back!

**JAMES.** And what about Jason?

**MS. KENNEDY.** What do you mean?

**JAMES.** He was taunting my son. Kicking him. Who was trying to hold him back?

**MS. KENNEDY.** Jason's a good kid.

**JAMES.** Apparently not.

**MS. KENNEDY.** Jason's not... Jason didn't bite me.

**JAMES.** Jason didn't have a reason to bite you.

(*MS. KENNEDY looks sternly at JAMES.*)

**MS. KENNEDY.** This is why I didn't want to do this with you.

**JAMES.** Do what?

**MS. KENNEDY.** I've told you the whole story. Now I need you to go. I can find my own doctor.

**JAMES.** I just, I didn't mean to—

**MS. KENNEDY.** No, you're defending your son, and that's only natural. You love him, I admire that about you, but I can't be around him anymore.

**JAMES.** I just want him to have a fair chance, that's all I'm asking.

**MS. KENNEDY.** He's had that.

**JAMES.** Do you really think so?

**MS. KENNEDY.** He's had all the chances I can give him.

(*Silence. JAMES looks at MS. KENNEDY.*)

**JAMES.** So what do you propose we do now?

**MS. KENNEDY.** We?

**JAMES.** You've been spending as much time with him as anyone. Do you think Daniel belongs in a special school?

**MS. KENNEDY.** Franklin Elementary is a black hole, where no one really gets the help they need.

**JAMES.** That's what I'm afraid of.

**MS. KENNEDY.** I have a friend who's just started teaching there.

**JAMES.** If we had all the money in the world, I'm sure there's a perfect place for him out there. But for right now, I don't know where...

**MS. KENNEDY.** He can't stay here.

**JAMES.** I know. I wouldn't ask that of you. But I'm starting to think that maybe he shouldn't be anywhere. Maybe we should homeschool him. At least for the time being. At least until we get his behavior under control.

**MS. KENNEDY.** That actually...sounds like a good idea.

**JAMES.** But my wife—

**MS. KENNEDY.** Yeah?

**JAMES.** She's not a teacher.

**MS. KENNEDY.** Right.

**JAMES.** We're going to need help.

**MS. KENNEDY.** Yeah.

**JAMES.** So do you think...? Would it be too much to ask, for you to help us?

**MS. KENNEDY.** How?

**JAMES.** With support. Lesson plans, activities.

**MS. KENNEDY.** There's curriculum you can send away for.

**JAMES.** That's great! Do you think you could recommend some?

**MS. KENNEDY.** I don't really know that much about it.

**JAMES.** You know more than we do.

**MS. KENNEDY.** I've only been working with Daniel for two months. You guys probably know more about his needs than I...

**JAMES.** But you're the expert, right?

**MS. KENNEDY.** I don't know.

*(RACHEL comes to the doorway and watches, neither of them see her.)*

**JAMES.** Sure you are. You know kids, I've seen you with them, you're...compassionate. And my wife...well, it's not really her strong point.

**MS. KENNEDY.** I'm sure she's great at other things.

**JAMES.** She is, she is.

**MS. KENNEDY.** Everyone's good at something. You just have to find the right approach.

**JAMES.** See? That's the kind of attitude I'm talking about. That's what I've been missing.

(MS. KENNEDY *smiles.*)

**JAMES.** Now, can I tie that bandage up properly?

**MS. KENNEDY.** Oh. Right.

(MS. KENNEDY *gives JAMES her arm, he unwraps her bandage.*)

**JAMES.** I could probably do the stitches myself, you know. If you want to come to my clinic.

**MS. KENNEDY.** Really? That would be great. But the tetanus shot—

**JAMES.** I'll give you someone to call.

(RACHEL *steps forward from the doorway.*)

**RACHEL.** That's very generous of you, James.

**JAMES.** Rachel! There you are.

**RACHEL.** Are you going to stitch up your son's cuts, too?

**JAMES.** Daniel doesn't have—

**RACHEL.** No. Only scrapes and bruises.

**JAMES.** He wouldn't sit still long enough for me to check.

**RACHEL.** I brought along his therapist. She got him a sedative.

**JAMES.** That's good.

**RACHEL.** Yeah, it was good. The nurse was about to call a social worker, check if we were abusing him.

**JAMES.** What?

**RACHEL.** But I got here just in time. (*Beat.*) Where were you?

**JAMES.** Ms. Kennedy was giving me the whole story.

**MS. KENNEDY.** (*A wave.*) Hello.

**RACHEL.** And?

**JAMES.** She has a lot of insight.

**RACHEL.** Doctor Baker called over to Franklin. They're holding a spot for him, he can start next Monday.

**JAMES.** Don't you think we should have discussed that together, first?

**RACHEL.** We couldn't find you.

**MS. KENNEDY.** Maybe I should—

(MS. KENNEDY *starts to leave.*)

**JAMES & RACHEL.** No.

(MS. KENNEDY *stays.*)

**JAMES.** I was just talking with Ms. Kennedy about the possibility of homeschooling him.

**RACHEL.** You're going to homeschool Daniel? How are you going to balance that with your work?

**JAMES.** She has some suggestions for curricula that we could look into, and in the meantime she's agreed to share her lessons with us.

**RACHEL.** Ms. Kennedy has no further obligation towards Daniel.

**MS. KENNEDY.** I'm really sorry. I did everything that I could for him. Really.

**RACHEL.** I know that. We should never have put you in this position to start with.

**JAMES.** Ms. Kennedy doesn't think we should send him to Franklin.

**RACHEL.** And she thinks it's my duty as his mother to give everything up and stay home full time.

**JAMES.** She doesn't...really know you.

**RACHEL.** But I thought you did.

**JAMES.** What do you—

**RACHEL.** Daniel crossed a line here. He bit his teacher! They're not going to let him back into this school, so I don't know what you're trying to accomplish.

**JAMES.** I want him to keep up with the regular lessons. (*To MS. KENNEDY:*) Please?

**MS. KENNEDY.** I...I wouldn't mind it.

**RACHEL.** James. We need to talk about this.

**JAMES.** (*To MS. KENNEDY:*) I can just stop by and pick them up from you, every few days.

RACHEL. You're not listening to me!

JAMES. No, I am, Rachel. I just don't agree with you. I'm not ready to stick my son in a warehouse to be babysat, okay? Maybe Doctor Baker and the therapist think that's a good solution, just sweep him into the corner, but I'm not ready to give up on my son.

RACHEL. It's not giving up. It's finding a way—

JAMES. We can talk about this later, Rachel. *(Beat.)* Right now, I have to take Ms. Kennedy to my clinic, take care of her arm.

RACHEL. Right.

JAMES. You can take Daniel home?

RACHEL. No, we'll come with you.

JAMES. You can't—

RACHEL. He's sleeping.

JAMES. I have some work to finish up there when I'm done.

RACHEL. Right.

JAMES. You can take care of him for one afternoon, can't you?

RACHEL. You never used to talk to me this way.

JAMES. Rachel—

*(RACHEL turns and exits the classroom. JAMES turns back to MS. KENNEDY.)*

JAMES. I'm sorry you had to see that.

MS. KENNEDY. It's okay.

JAMES. Okay. Let's get you taken care of.

*(Lights.)*

## Scene 2

*(A playground. RACHEL sits on a swing. LUCIA approaches.)*

LUCIA. Where's Daniel?

RACHEL. Sleeping. I tried calling, but you—

LUCIA. You've been giving him the pills?

RACHEL. They might be a little strong.

LUCIA. We can call his doctor, get her to adjust the prescription. Or you can just give him half.

**RACHEL.** It's kind of nice, actually. Getting him to nap? James's sisters are willing to come over and watch him when he's asleep. When he's awake, they— And I needed the fresh air anyway.

(LUCIA sits on a swing next to RACHEL.)

**LUCIA.** Yeah. Me too.

(RACHEL pulls out a wrapped gift bag.)

**RACHEL.** I got this for you. To say thank you.

**LUCIA.** I got your son a sedative. Anyone could have done that.

**RACHEL.** But you're the one who did.

**LUCIA.** Okay.

**RACHEL.** I appreciated it. That's all I'm saying.

(LUCIA opens the bag. RACHEL sits. LUCIA pulls a colorful glass vase from the bag.)

**LUCIA.** Oh...it's beautiful.

**RACHEL.** Do you like it?

**LUCIA.** Does this mean that your shipment came?

**RACHEL.** No! I got this one at Target.

**LUCIA.** Good deal.

**RACHEL.** I don't think the shipment's ever going to come. But it turns out everything's replaceable! That's what I've come to America to learn. Everything's disposable. *(Beat.)* Upgradeable.

**LUCIA.** What's wrong?

**RACHEL.** I didn't get enough sleep.

**LUCIA.** He's bad?

**RACHEL.** Daniel? Of course he's bad! He thinks he's a rabid dog.

**LUCIA.** We've been working on that.

**RACHEL.** I know, but it feels like he's only been getting worse. The last few days, he hasn't spoken. Since we brought him home from the school, it's only...barking. He's been different ever since the move, more distant, more scared, but he was never actually violent! Not until...

**LUCIA.** Rachel, I'm—

**RACHEL.** You're trying, I know. And it does seem to be helping with the nightmares. But then he sleeps better and that gives him more energy in the day and this...attack. He's going to do it to me, I

know it. Every time I come near him, barking and growling. I can't even change his clothes anymore. He's been wearing the same shirt for the last three days, this disgusting blue... I've tried to get it off him, but he won't— He wasn't like this before!

**LUCIA.** These things take time, Rachel.

**RACHEL.** I know that, but I don't— (*Beat.*) James has decided to keep Daniel home, full time.

**LUCIA.** What happened to Franklin?

**RACHEL.** He refuses to send him.

**LUCIA.** Do you need me to talk to him?

**RACHEL.** It won't make a difference. We were up fighting about it all night. He says that if I loved Daniel and I loved him—if I cared about my family I would do this for them.

**LUCIA.** That is total bullshit.

**RACHEL.** I know! But what am I supposed to say to something like that?

**LUCIA.** That Daniel scares you and you can't do it on your own?

**RACHEL.** But he doesn't get it. He thinks that I purposely push Daniel's buttons. That I get him riled up. And I don't know if I can blame him, because by the time he gets home at night, Daniel is so worn out, he's too tired to fight anymore. So all James ever sees is this sweet little sleepy kid. It's like a Jekyll and Hyde thing, and he never sees Jekyll, you know?

**LUCIA.** I think Hyde is the bad one.

**RACHEL.** Really? Jekyll sounds so much more sinister.

**LUCIA.** Jekyll has a doctorate. I think it's supposed to civilize him.

**RACHEL.** Right. (*Beat.*) If I were working, or if I were in school, he'd understand. But right now...it's impossible to say no to him, isn't it?

**LUCIA.** It shouldn't be.

**RACHEL.** But you're the one who keeps telling me I have to make sacrifices!

**LUCIA.** Not this kind of—

**RACHEL.** But I know that if I do this I'm going to go insane! I really am. I'm going to do something really crazy. I'm going to hurt Daniel, or I'm going to push him to hurt me.

**LUCIA.** Okay, calm down. You're not going to do that.

**RACHEL.** But I don't even know who I am anymore! I just know that I can't have this be my life. I can't spend all of this time caring for this kid who...he could snap at any moment...and I give, and I give, and I don't know what I'm supposed to be getting out of it!

**LUCIA.** Motherhood is hard.

**RACHEL.** Why do people do it? I mean seriously, why would I want to spend my life doing this?

**LUCIA.** You don't do it for a reward. You do it because you love him. You love your son.

**RACHEL.** Yeah. Well...

**LUCIA.** My son hasn't spoken to me in three months. And even then it was just for a minute, just to say he was coming by to pick up some of his father's clothes from my house. I was so excited to get to see him. But he came by when I wasn't home, took the clothes, and left, not even a note. I couldn't believe it. When I got home I thought I'd been burgled. He had called my office to make sure I was working, to make sure that I was with a patient when he came by.

**RACHEL.** That's...

**LUCIA.** He's taken his father's side, even with the girlfriend. He thinks I should forgive his dad, keep the family together.

**RACHEL.** He doesn't know...

**LUCIA.** That his father was always like that? No. And it's not my place.

**RACHEL.** That's ridiculous! Of course it's your place. His father is a bastard!

**LUCIA.** A boy deserves to be able to love his father.

**RACHEL.** It's not fair.

**LUCIA.** Of course it's not fair. Parenthood's not a fair thing. It's not "I give this energy, and the child gives back smiles and presents," or anything like that. It's give give give. Enjoy the giving.

**RACHEL.** *(Beat.)* How did you find out?

**LUCIA.** About what?

**RACHEL.** Your husband's girlfriends.

**LUCIA.** What do you mean? How long have you been married?

**RACHEL.** Five years.

**LUCIA.** So you just know, don't you?

RACHEL. Oh.

LUCIA. What's going on?

RACHEL. Nothing. I just think part of the reason that James—that teacher—

LUCIA. Yes?

RACHEL. He stitched up her arm the other day.

LUCIA. And that's...?

RACHEL. I don't know! He arranged to keep picking up lessons from her. And—maybe it's all for Daniel. I'd like to think it was. I'd like to think it was nothing.

LUCIA. But you know whether it was nothing.

RACHEL. I do.

LUCIA. I could get Tanya to talk to the teacher, if you want.

RACHEL. Oh.

LUCIA. I mean, she's already causing enough problems for her. Third grade is when statewide testing starts, and that class is falling way behind. I'm sure if I told Tanya about the arrangement...

RACHEL. Okay.

LUCIA. But then you'd have to promise me something.

RACHEL. What?

LUCIA. We can get him into that school, we can get someone else to be the teacher, but you still need to be his mother.

RACHEL. I am.

LUCIA. No, not really. Not yet.

RACHEL. I'm trying, but he's—

LUCIA. He's trying to push you away, and you're letting him. He's not really going to hurt you. He's testing you, seeing what will happen if he pushes. And you have to take it, that's your job as his mother.

RACHEL. But I...I think he hates me, Lucia.

LUCIA. He chose you. You brought him back to your village and he stayed with you.

RACHEL. That was in a different lifetime. This time...

LUCIA. All kids hate their parents at one point or another.

RACHEL. Yeah?

**LUCIA.** It passes. The important thing is that you stand your ground.

**RACHEL.** But he's so strong.

**LUCIA.** He's eight.

**RACHEL.** Yeah.

**LUCIA.** No one's asking you to do it alone.

**RACHEL.** But they are! That's not true, I'm all alone here! I have no help, no friends, no family, my husband's disappearing in front of me—

**LUCIA.** You have me.

**RACHEL.** Do you want to take him?

**LUCIA.** (*Laughs.*) No.

**RACHEL.** You'd be a better parent to him than James or I, that's for sure.

**LUCIA.** No...that part of my life is...in the past.

**RACHEL.** But you could start over, if you wanted to. A lot of women don't get started on families until they're your age.

**LUCIA.** I don't know how they do it. I'm so set in my ways... The older you get, the harder it is to adapt.

**RACHEL.** Yeah.

**LUCIA.** But you're not too old to adapt, are you?

**RACHEL.** To parenthood or to living in America?

**LUCIA.** You choose.

(*LUCIA swings.*)

**RACHEL.** Thank you. For helping with him.

**LUCIA.** Don't thank me. It's just my job.

**RACHEL.** It seems above and beyond.

**LUCIA.** It's not. It's just what older mothers have been doing for the new ones since the beginning of time.

(*LUCIA puts her hand out and holds RACHEL'S. They swing in silence.*)

(*Lights.*)

## Scene 3

*(Tanya's office. LUCIA in one of the straight-backed chairs, reading a book. TANYA enters.)*

TANYA. I'm sorry about that...chair.

LUCIA. Why?

TANYA. It's not the most comfortable place to sit.

LUCIA. I know. You do it on purpose.

TANYA. You could have sat in mine.

LUCIA. I did. It's even less comfortable.

TANYA. What do you mean? It's a healthy back chair. It's clinically tested, straightens out your spine.

LUCIA. I don't need to sit on a rack.

TANYA. Whatever. It's your back.

LUCIA. It is.

*(TANYA sits in her chair. Stretches out.)*

TANYA. What's going on?

LUCIA. Nothing. I just came by to see you.

TANYA. I don't buy that for a second.

LUCIA. What's that supposed to mean? You're my best friend.

TANYA. I thought you were mad at me.

LUCIA. I'm not.

TANYA. You haven't talked to me in weeks.

LUCIA. I called you yesterday. I left you a message.

TANYA. And when I called back you didn't pick up.

LUCIA. It was late.

TANYA. We used to spend time together.

LUCIA. Tanya, are you...?

TANYA. But ever since you kicked out that husband of yours, you don't call. So it makes me wonder. Maybe you never wanted to spend time with me. Maybe you just wanted to spend time away from Alfred.

LUCIA. I didn't come here to be guilt-tripped, Tanya.

TANYA. Then why did you?

*(Long silence.)*

LUCIA. I'll go.

*(LUCIA stands.)*

TANYA. No. Stay.

*(She sits back down.)*

I'm sorry, I just—I worry. If you tell me that you've been making new friends, that you've found a new hobby, that's fine. I just want to know that you're not...retreating from the world.

LUCIA. I'm not.

TANYA. Good.

LUCIA. I've actually been spending time with Rachel Wall.

TANYA. Who?

LUCIA. Daniel Martin's mother.

TANYA. I am so glad that chapter of my life is over.

LUCIA. That's just the thing, it's not. Your little teacher's still got herself involved.

TANYA. How?

LUCIA. She's helping them to homeschool the kid.

TANYA. She's what?

LUCIA. She's giving the father her lessons. And I think Rachel, she's going to lose it if she has to do it much longer.

TANYA. That little snit.

LUCIA. I know.

TANYA. I got that kid out of her classroom so she could actually start teaching! And I got him a spot at Franklin. I had to use up a favor with Susan Thomas for that one.

LUCIA. And he never made it there.

TANYA. I can't believe this!

LUCIA. I'm sorry to make it your problem again.

TANYA. No, it was already my problem. You just brought it to my attention.

LUCIA. You'll talk with her?

TANYA. Of course I'll talk with her! I may even have to fire her.

LUCIA. Don't do that.

TANYA. She's been on thin ice for weeks. Her classroom is like a hurricane. I've given her so much advice, so many chances, but the only thing that's stuck is a new pair of shoes.

LUCIA. I just don't want to be the cause...

TANYA. Don't worry. You're not.

LUCIA. Good.

TANYA. I don't know if it'll solve your little friend's problem, though. If the father wants to homeschool the kid, there's plenty of curricula out there he can buy.

LUCIA. Isn't there some kind of accreditation system?

TANYA. Sure, but it's results-based, like everything else. There's testing.

LUCIA. But in the meantime, there's nothing—

TANYA. There's always something.

LUCIA. What?

TANYA. I'll take care of it.

LUCIA. I don't want Rachel to get into any trouble over this.

TANYA. My responsibility is to the child.

LUCIA. I know that.

TANYA. And I know that you knew that, bringing this to my attention. So you can't turn around now and ask me to pull my punches. I have a responsibility here, now that I'm aware of the situation.

LUCIA. What does that mean?

TANYA. It sounds to me like the child is being neglected. There's only one thing I can do.

LUCIA. Tanya.

TANYA. It's my job.

*(TANYA picks up the phone.)*

LUCIA. Come on, Tanya, don't. That's not going to help anyone right now. Just forget that I said anything.

TANYA. How am I supposed to do that?

LUCIA. Just— Tell the parents first. Threaten them first.

TANYA. And what do you think that will do?

**LUCIA.** It'll take the homeschool option off the table, at least, and we can come up with another plan. She'll send him to Franklin or else we'll come up with something else. We'll figure it out.

**TANYA.** We?

**LUCIA.** I've been working with her. She's come a long way already. She just needs a little more help.

**TANYA.** So does Daniel.

**LUCIA.** You really think he'd be better off in the system?

**TANYA.** Some people just aren't cut out to be parents.

**LUCIA.** But he's been through enough already!

**TANYA.** And clearly things aren't getting better.

**LUCIA.** No. They are.

I'm working with Rachel, and I'm helping. And it's...it's helping me, too. I mean, I think I'm finally finding my way through this mess of my life. I'm finding a way I can get back to work again. Maybe I can't work with kids anymore, but parents...

**TANYA.** You really think parents are just going to reach out to you for help?

**LUCIA.** Maybe, yeah.

**TANYA.** That's not something they're generally very good at doing.

**LUCIA.** Can you just...try to be supportive, for one minute?

**TANYA.** I'm just saying. In my experience.

**LUCIA.** Well, your experience is a little limited in this area, don't you think?

**TANYA.** Why? Because I never chose to be a mother?

*(Silence.)*

Maybe I've never been a mother, but I know kids, Lucia. I've been in the trenches, I know what it's like. And I've known Robert since he was seven years old. I was there every step of the way.

**LUCIA.** No.

**TANYA.** You don't think it hurts me, too, that he's gone?

**LUCIA.** But it's not the same thing.

**TANYA.** Because he'll talk to me?

**LUCIA.** No. I'm sorry, but you just don't understand.

TANYA. I'm trying—

LUCIA. But you can't.

*(Pause.)*

TANYA. I don't see how it's so different.

LUCIA. Neither did Rachel. That was the problem.

TANYA. But it's—

LUCIA. Robert was a mess when you met him. Alfred and I, we needed you to help us set boundaries. Robert needed you. We couldn't have raised such a healthy kid without you.

TANYA. Thank you.

LUCIA. You're a really great principal, Tanya. I hope you know that. I appreciate everything that you've done for us.

*(LUCIA gets up to leave.)*

TANYA. Thank you.

LUCIA. But I'm not...I'm done with being your student.

*(Lights.)*

#### Scene 4

*(The classroom. JAMES enters and approaches MS. KENNEDY at her desk.)*

MS. KENNEDY. Oh. Hi!

JAMES. How are you doing?

*(JAMES crosses around to Ms. Kennedy's side of the desk to give her a kiss on each cheek. It's awkward.)*

MS. KENNEDY. Uh, I...

JAMES. Sorry.

MS. KENNEDY. That was—

JAMES. Something I picked up in Africa.

MS. KENNEDY. Kissing people...?

JAMES. There are a lot of Europeans there.

MS. KENNEDY. Right.

JAMES. You called, I came.

**MS. KENNEDY.** I said you should call me back.

**JAMES.** It's just a few minutes away.

**MS. KENNEDY.** Right.

**JAMES.** I thought maybe I could take you out to lunch.

**MS. KENNEDY.** It's three o'clock.

**JAMES.** I'm on a different schedule, I guess. Coffee?

**MS. KENNEDY.** No, I...

**JAMES.** You have work to do, you can just give me the lessons and I'll go.

**MS. KENNEDY.** No.

**JAMES.** No?

**MS. KENNEDY.** I just wanted to tell you. I can't give them to you anymore.

**JAMES.** Excuse me?

**MS. KENNEDY.** Doctor Baker was supposed to call you.

**JAMES.** But you called me first.

**MS. KENNEDY.** In case you were going to come by.

**JAMES.** Okay. But you and I had an arrangement. I don't see what this has to do with her.

**MS. KENNEDY.** She says that you're using me.

**JAMES.** And what do you think?

**MS. KENNEDY.** I don't know, I just...?

(**MS. KENNEDY** *tries*.)

I don't want to get in any more trouble.

**JAMES.** I don't want that either. I'm just trying to understand what happened here.

**MS. KENNEDY.** Okay.

**JAMES.** What's Doctor Baker's problem?

**MS. KENNEDY.** She just, she says that you can't homeschool Daniel. She says you're unfit for it, because he's a special needs child and you and your wife aren't...you don't know how to cater to his needs.

**JAMES.** What does she know about his needs?

**MS. KENNEDY.** I just—she said you need to put him in a special school like Franklin, or else it's, she's going to report you for educational neglect.

**JAMES.** What does that even mean?

**MS. KENNEDY.** Usually it's like when a kid is habitually truant, or if a kid is pulled out of school and no one knows why? I took a course on it last year. I mean, on all kinds of child abuse. And I guess because Daniel is special needs—

**JAMES.** Is she threatening us?

**MS. KENNEDY.** She said she would call you.

**JAMES.** And she's going to turn us in?

**MS. KENNEDY.** If you don't send Daniel to Franklin, yes. She'll report you to Child Protective Services.

**JAMES.** And then what?

**MS. KENNEDY.** I don't know.

**JAMES.** Your professor didn't tell you what Child Protective Services would do?

**MS. KENNEDY.** I guess they come check you out, and if they think Daniel is being abused—neglected—they would...take him away from you.

**JAMES.** I can't believe this.

**MS. KENNEDY.** I know!

**JAMES.** What does she know? What does that bitch think she knows about my kid? I mean, you and I agreed—

**MS. KENNEDY.** I know.

**JAMES.** You don't think that I'm abusing my child, do you?

**MS. KENNEDY.** No! I don't think any of this! Doctor Baker—

**JAMES.** Thinks that Daniel is being abused.

**MS. KENNEDY.** Neglected.

**JAMES.** Which is a form of abuse.

**MS. KENNEDY.** I'm sorry. I really don't know anything more, okay? I just know that I'm not supposed to give you Daniel's assignments, and you're supposed to leave me alone.

**JAMES.** I'm not—

**MS. KENNEDY.** You're not a healthy relationship for me to have in my life! I'm not going to get anywhere with you, because you're married, and you've got this child, and I always get interested in the wrong men. I'm just, I've just gotten infatuated with you because you're unattainable.

**JAMES.** What?

**MS. KENNEDY.** And because you're strong. It's because of my relationship with my father.

**JAMES.** What are you talking about?

**MS. KENNEDY.** It's what my therapist says.

**JAMES.** That you're infatuated with me?

**MS. KENNEDY.** Oh...crap.

**JAMES.** I'm sorry, I just don't know what to—

**MS. KENNEDY.** Stop it! Forget it! Forget what I just said.

**JAMES.** I don't know what to say.

**MS. KENNEDY.** Don't say anything.

**JAMES.** Okay.

**MS. KENNEDY.** I just...I let my feelings take over my judgment sometimes. It's what I do. But I'm working on it.

**JAMES.** I'm sorry if I...

**MS. KENNEDY.** You don't have anything to be sorry for.

**JAMES.** But I am. This has been a really tough situation for me, too, this whole thing. Starting a new life here, a new business, and things with Daniel...and you've been...

**MS. KENNEDY.** Yeah.

**JAMES.** My wife and I come from very different worlds. We don't see eye to eye on anything lately. And then there's you.

**MS. KENNEDY.** Yeah?

**JAMES.** And it makes me think.

**MS. KENNEDY.** ...what?

**JAMES.** I guess I'm saying: I don't know if your therapist is right in saying that your taste in men is all wrong. Because I guess if the circumstances were different, I would.

**MS. KENNEDY.** You would.

**JAMES.** I'd be interested.

MS. KENNEDY. Really?

JAMES. Yeah.

MS. KENNEDY. Yeah?

JAMES. Yeah. I think I would.

*(Silence.)*

MS. KENNEDY. What are we supposed to do now?

JAMES. I think I'm supposed to go home.

MS. KENNEDY. And what am I supposed to do?

JAMES. Whatever you were going to do before I showed up.

*(Lights.)*

### Scene 5

*(James and Rachel's kitchen. JAMES enters and sees dishes piled high, but no evidence of his wife.)*

JAMES. Rachel. Rachel?

RACHEL. *(Offstage:)* I'm in the mud room.

JAMES. What?

RACHEL. *(Offstage:)* I'm in the...the laundry.

*(JAMES looks around the kitchen, clearing dishes.)*

*RACHEL enters, wearing rubber gloves.)*

JAMES. What are you doing?

RACHEL. Hand washing.

JAMES. Did you find a way to break the machine already?

RACHEL. Daniel's been wearing his blue shirt all week. But I managed to get it off him tonight, it only took an hour.

JAMES. Just let him wear it, what's the big deal?

RACHEL. It was covered in spaghetti sauce, it was disgusting.

*(Beat.)*

He can wear it again tomorrow, but it needed to be washed.

JAMES. Well—

RACHEL. I'm trying to set boundaries with him.

**JAMES.** That's good.

**RACHEL.** Where have you been?

**JAMES.** At work.

**RACHEL.** I called your clinic. You left at three.

**JAMES.** I stopped by the school.

**RACHEL.** And then?

**JAMES.** And then I didn't call.

**RACHEL.** We got a message from Doctor Baker.

**JAMES.** I heard.

**RACHEL.** You should have called me back before you stopped by the school, could have saved you a trip.

**JAMES.** I was waiting for the right time.

**RACHEL.** Sounds like you missed it.

*(Silence. RACHEL turns to go back to the laundry room.)*

**JAMES.** Where are you going?

**RACHEL.** The shirt? I still need to rinse it.

**JAMES.** It can wait.

**RACHEL.** But I put bleach in the water. It could get ruined.

**JAMES.** We need to talk about this, Rachel.

**RACHEL.** It's Daniel's favorite shirt.

*(RACHEL exits. JAMES steps over to a sideboard and grabs a small tumbler. He takes out a bottle of scotch to pour himself a glass. The bottle is empty.*

*JAMES throws the glass violently to the floor. It bounces, but doesn't break.*

*RACHEL reenters, her gloves off. They both stare at the glass on the floor.)*

**RACHEL.** It's plastic.

**JAMES.** I guess so.

**RACHEL.** They don't have glass things here. Only plastic things that look like glass.

*(RACHEL picks up the tumbler and puts it in the sink.)*

**JAMES.** Are you finished with the laundry?

**RACHEL.** For now.

(*RACHEL sits.*)

**JAMES.** Doctor Baker is threatening to call Child Protective services on our family.

**RACHEL.** I know.

**JAMES.** How can you be sitting there so calmly?

**RACHEL.** What were you out doing with Ms. Kennedy?

**JAMES.** I wasn't doing anything with Ms. Kennedy! I went to the school to talk to her. And then I got in my car, and started driving. I wanted to come home but I thought it would be better to wait until I knew Daniel was safe in bed. I didn't want him to have to hear us fighting again.

**RACHEL.** Then let's not fight.

**JAMES.** You called Doctor Baker. You asked her to do this.

**RACHEL.** No.

**JAMES.** Well I've been thinking about it all afternoon and I don't know how else she would have found out about our arrangement.

**RACHEL.** You were trying to keep it a secret?

**JAMES.** It was none of her business!

**RACHEL.** Of course it was her business! Ms. Kennedy is a teacher in her school!

**JAMES.** So you did tell her.

**RACHEL.** No!

**JAMES.** Then who did?

**RACHEL.** I don't know, Ms. Kennedy? That little twit might not be as honest and straightforward as you think!

**JAMES.** She wouldn't.

**RACHEL.** What? Be unable to tell you that she had? Want to pass the blame? No, that isn't like her at all.

**JAMES.** Why do you hate her so much?

**RACHEL.** I don't hate her, she's not worth hating, she's just a stupid little kid...

**JAMES.** She's a teacher.

**RACHEL.** Anyone can teach third grade.

**JAMES.** Even you?

**RACHEL.** I don't want to.

**JAMES.** But you could. You could teach Daniel. If "anyone" can.

**RACHEL.** I guess it upsets me how much you like her.

**JAMES.** What does that...?

**RACHEL.** How much time you spend over there.

**JAMES.** I've been trying to look out for our son.

**RACHEL.** But there's an attraction there, isn't there?

**JAMES.** Rachel...I don't even know what you're accusing me of.

**RACHEL.** I'm not accusing you of anything!

**JAMES.** Ms. Kennedy listens to me, okay? Ms. Kennedy is warm, and kind and...she cares about Daniel.

**RACHEL.** And I don't?

**JAMES.** I'm not saying that.

**RACHEL.** But that's the implication.

**JAMES.** (*Beat.*) You don't always put his interests first.

**RACHEL.** And you do?

**JAMES.** I'm building an entire life around his interests.

**RACHEL.** How can you say that?

**JAMES.** Bringing him back here? Buying a house in a good school district? Setting up my practice? Investing in his future?

**RACHEL.** None of that is for him!

**JAMES.** I'm giving him everything he never had in his old life. A beautiful home, hot food on the table, a safe bed to sleep in, toys, clothes, an education...

**RACHEL.** A family?

**JAMES.** I'm trying to do that, yes!

**RACHEL.** You call these things gifts, but you haven't sacrificed a thing.

**JAMES.** And you have?

**RACHEL.** How can you even ask me that?

*(Silence. RACHEL stares at JAMES.)*

**THIS PLAY IS  
NOT OVER!**

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