

The Good Father

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written by

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## CAST OF CHARACTERS

*Viola and Ann: Bart's wife, Paul's wife- 40's*

*Jess: Gabe's sister- 30's (portrays a teen briefly)*

*Nancy and Natalie: Psychiatrist and Gabe's girlfriend*

*Paul: Gabe's father- 40's (portrays 20's briefly)*

*Bart: Paul's father- 50's*

*Gabe: Lucas' father- early 30's*

*Young Gabe, Young Paul and Lucas: 8-10 years old.*

*Diner Patrons: played by Gabe and Jess*

*The stage is set solely by the women in the play. They move in unison almost like a choreographed dance. They are fluid and exquisite. They may carry set pieces out as they enter and exit the stage. The set may remain quite simple (a desk, a chair, a lamp, a laptop, a bed, etc.) but the lifting falls solely on them. Even if that means male characters are standing around watching and waiting for them. The events of the previous scene are all over their faces and bodies. They grow tired, but don't falter often.*

*The scenes in the psychiatrist's office have no place or time.*

*The women are played by the same three actors. The boys are played by the same young actor.*

## PROLOGUE

*BLANK STAGE.*

*One old man- Bart stands stage left. One young boy- Lucas stage right. This is done quietly and with no hyperbole. It's fact. The spotlight falls on them one at a time.*

LUCAS

He was a mean, manipulative, deceitful, selfish asshole.

BART

All the time?

*BLACK OUT.*

## SCENE 1

*A psychiatrist's office. Two chairs facing each other with Gabe (30's) and Nancy his psychiatrist. Can be a very simple set. She takes notes. Naturally.*

*Gabe vacillates between dead pan sarcasm and wild charisma. Also he's not as funny as he thinks he is. She finds Gabe amusing. Sometimes.*

*They stare at each other for an uncomfortably long time. 25 seconds maybe. Take your time.*

GABE

I hate you.

NANCY

Why do you think that is?

GABE

Because you're gonna make me get rid of Gabe number one. I know it. And then I'll have absolutely nothing to live for.

NANCY

Do you really believe that? That I'd force you to lose a part of yourself here?

GABE

Everyone else wants me to. Everybody hates Gabe one. Which is me. So... really I guess everybody just fucking hates me.

NANCY

Ok. Well. Let's not worry about everyone else right now. Who named you Gabe one and two?

GABE

Melanie. She said it's like she's living with two different people. She told me I had to get rid of at least Gabe one or she wouldn't stay. I called her a controlling bitch. She took Lucas and left. And screamed that I'd never see him again.

NANCY

Tell me what you like about Gabe one.

GABE

Well he's interesting. And smart as hell. And creative. And quick. And calculated. And he's me. So I guess I'm partial.

NANCY

And Gabe two? He's not you? Not interesting?

GABE

Ohhh yeah, he's a proper fuckin' clown. Give that man a pack of condoms and he'll whip you up a tulip hat in two shakes. Just brimming with humor and individuality, that one.

NANCY

So would it be safe to say you think he's a bit boring?

GABE

And a pussy. He says yes sir and no sir and whines and can't get out of bed for days but can never tell you why. He just stares at the wall and mentally goes over the seven exit plans he's rehearsed. All he needs is a rope, but preferably a window. He's pathetic. He's a pussy.

NANCY

You mentioned that.

GABE

Well it's for emphasis.

NANCY

Sure. (beat) I have to say, I feel like it really depends on what your idea of a pussy is. I happen to think they're the original super heroes. So.

GABE

Oh right. Cuz of the... the me too thing. Sorry.  
(Long beat.)

NANCY

OK. Can you tell me anything you like about Gabe two?

GABE

His kid's ok, I guess.

NANCY

Just ok? He looks pretty beautiful to me.

GABE

Yeah. He's got his mom's eyes. Thank god. The less of me in him the better.

(beat)

I think there's something wrong with him though. He freaks out and starts laughing and shrieking like a hyena out of nowhere. It's annoying and ear shattering. Like nails on a chalk board annoying. It's like being stabbed repeatedly in the ear with a nail. Or like.. something sharper. What's sharper? ...Cheese! Ha!

NANCY

Gabe, let's talk about your dad for a minute.

GABE

Nancy, I'm hilarious. Just admit it.

NANCY

Can you tell me something you remember about him when you were Lucas' age?

GABE

Jesus christ. Here we go. Well. I don't remember a lot. As I said in our first enlightening session.

NANCY

I know. Just take a moment. Give it a try.

GABE

Uhhh. I remember laughing a lot. With my mom. But he'd walk in the room and something would happen. I can't remember what. Just that we stopped laughing. Like we knew we had to. I remember someone saying shush, I think. I don't know. I can't remember who.

NANCY

That's great. Really great, Gabe. Now, can you tell me... and this is a little trickier. After you have an 'episode' as you call it in front of Lucas or AT Lucas... have you ever noticed what his face is doing? Like, has a particular facial expression he's made while you're (she looks down at her notepad) "losing your mind like a psychopath on your baby boy for dropping his sippy cup" ever stuck with you? Has Lucas' face ever replayed in your mind later that day?

GABE

What? Am I seriously paying you for this?

NANCY

Yes, Gabe. Please stay with me here. It's not an insult, I just want to explore something. When you see Lucas' face...

GABE

I know his name, you don't have to keep fucking saying it Nancy.

PNANCY

Ok. Let's take a moment. How do you feel right now, Gabe.

GABE

Like I wanna punch something... Nancy.

NANCY

Do you feel like I'm attacking you?

## GABE

Hell yeah you're attacking me! You're trying to make me be somebody I don't want to fucking be! You're trying to murder Gabe one!

*Gabe stands up and starts frantically pacing back and forth, rambling on at an alarming pace.*

Why does everyone like him so much? He just sits there! He just fucking sits there and doesn't do anything! He's a mope and he's useless and he's boring as shit and he CRIES! He cries! And he paints totally worthless crap! I swear to God, you don't know what you're talking about. This was a bad idea. This was such a bad idea. I gotta go. I don't know about next week. I gotta go.

*Gabe quickly exits, leaving Nancy alone on stage. She takes out her voice recorder.*

## NANCY

Second session with Gabriel Johns. Is still unsure about meeting with me although I feel I may be gaining a bit of trust. It's hard to tell. After careful consideration I've decided not to tell Gabe about treating his father. Will revisit at a later time.

*She switches the recorder off.*

## SCENE 2

*STAGE RIGHT. 1995. The women set up Paul's study while he paces around it, weaving in between them. They never run into each other. They never see each other. There's a desk, a big laptop, a shelf with books. It's the middle of the night. We hear a clock ticking. He stares up at the ceiling intermittently like he sees something. But we can't be sure.*

*He walks over to his bookshelf and picks up a RED JOURNAL. He thumbs through it, grabs a post-it note from his desk then starts furiously notating. Writing on, then ripping post its and sticking them everywhere. In the journal, on the desk, on his computer, on the floor.*

*He walks over to his desk, sets the journal open and begins to type on his computer, looking back and forth between the journal and the typed page as if he's copying from one to the other.*

PAUL  
 (speaking slowly to himself  
 as he types it out)

There's very little chance this narrative will survive in its original form on the way toward a more comprehensive report, but maybe it will serve to get me started...

*While Paul is sitting typing, lights come up on STAGE LEFT. The women are setting up The GLF Diner, 1953. A counter and 4 stools in front of it. A cash register. A pie case if it's available. A table or two nearby. Paul remains typing in dim light STAGE RIGHT throughout this scene. Bart (50's) is sitting, wobbling at the end of the counter, smoking a cigarette with a cup of coffee and a quart of vodka next to it.*

*There are two patrons sitting at the counter, drinking coffee. Viola (40's) is the counter waitress. Serving coffee. Smiling at the patrons (we can only see their backs- as they are played by Gabe and Jessica).*

*Young Paul (8-10ish) is sitting at a table himself, making a paper airplane. There's paper all around him and he's trying really hard.*

BART

It's called a Corvette. A Cor-vette. Sounds like a ladies name to me, don't know why they'd want a ladies name but we'll get one, you watch. Cherry red. Peelin' down the street. Remember when we got the Bel Air? Hoooy!! Everyone lookin at us, respectin' us. Now we gotta worry about the commies gettin into our schools. Teachin our kids how to be... whatever they are.

Things are changing too fast! It's too much for everyone! You know they're over there killing babies, V! They're, they're, they don't care about anyone's life! They're just killing their own babies for what? For some cigarettes!! They're ana, ama, animals! V! (beat)

My beautiful wife. Look at her. Have you ever seen such a beauty. And she can cook. I know what I got. Don't you worry. I know. What. I. Got.

*Bart jumps up (almost falls over) and scoops up his wife in his arms. He starts dancing with her all over the restaurant. She's laughing hysterically and as they dance by the spot where he was sitting she grabs the vodka bottle and slyly chucks it in the garbage.*

*They continue to dance for a few more seconds until he dips her. He falls over and drops her, nearly on her head. They both laugh and V scrambles to put herself back together in front of the customers. She's embarrassed but tries to cover it. She exits into the back kitchen through the swinging doors.*

*Bart sits back down and laughs to himself. He goes to grab the vodka bottle absentmindedly and it's not there. He looks all around him confused. Then forgets.*

*Young Paul jumps up from the booth and runs up to Bart with a paper airplane he folded all by himself. It's impressive.*

YOUNG PAUL

Daddy! Look what I made!

*Bart doesn't look up from his ashtray. He takes another long pull from the cigarette and blows it out drunkenly. He stands up, stubs out the cigarette after repeated attempts then walks to the register. He opens it up, takes out \$1 and shuts it.*

*Never looking at his little boy or his proud creation.*

*Then something comes over him. He opens the register back up and starts furiously counting every single dollar and penny. He's obsessed. He starts rambling to himself not quite loud enough for her to hear from the kitchen.*

BART

I swear to god she would't know shit from shinola. You wouldn't know shit from shinola, V! I told you to put the dollar bills all facing the same direction in the register so's I can count 'em easier! It's really not that hard is it? Even for you? IS IT? It's so simple! I don't understand why you want the business to fail! Why do you wanna give all our money away? She's tryin' to take the place down, I know it! I knew it when I met her. Can't trust her worth nothin'. She's like dead weight, I tell ya!

YOUNG PAUL

Daddy! Did you see what I made Dad? Just like the one you flew! You see dad? Dad? Dad? Dad?

*The patrons in the restaurant watch the entire interaction. They look around the room.*

*One of them may even look at the ceiling and whistle. Then they look at the little boy. Bart exits into the kitchen.*

*Viola enters from the back, smiling with the patron's breakfast.*

VIOLA

Here ya go Phil! Crispy like ya like 'em! I had Louis put extra bacon on the side.

*She winks and smiles. Exits back to the kitchen.*

*We hear a huge crash and a muffled scream from the back. Scares the heck out of everyone. She enters from the kitchen completely disheveled. She straightens her skirt as if in a daze and almost falls over. Everyone at the diner is staring at her. She has some blood coming out of her nose, but doesn't notice.*

PATRON

V, you got somethin' there.

*She touches her nose. Smiles.*

VIOLA

Thank you so much, Phil. Lost my balance back there. Gotta get those eyes checked! I've been promising Bart I'd get that done. One of these days, right? When the coffee serves itself!

*She grabs a napkin and calmly exits into the kitchen. Lights go down on STAGE LEFT. Viola enters back onto stage with a bird cage, walks into Paul's study, sets the cage on the desk then exits.*

### SCENE 3

*1982. Lights come up on Paul STAGE RIGHT in his study. Morning.*

*Sitting on top of his desk is a bird cage with a parakeet inside. He's whistling and coaxing it.*

PAUL

I'm a pretty bird. I'm a pretty bird. Petey! Petey!  
Riiiiiiight here. I'm. A pretty bird.

I'm-a-pre-tty-biiiiiiiird. I'm a pretty bird! I'm a pretty bird. I'm a pretty bird.

*This goes on for a bit. It's hilarious. We hear audio of the bird chirping and starting to form these words. Slowly.*

*Ann enters in workout attire. She stands there and stares at him for a minute. Blank.*

PAUL (CONT'D)

Good morning my Queen Ann! You sleep ok? Did you hear Petey? I got up around three and started on him again. Couldn't sleep. Too many things to do. He's really coming around. I taped a lot of our session together so we can see what his progress is. He said 'good morning Paul' before you got here. Just want to remind you... You said I couldn't do it.

*Paul stands up and grabs her by the waist. He tries to dance with her.*

*She politely and lovingly, yet firmly pushes him away. (beat) Paul sits back down.*

ANN

Paul. Did you forget to take Gabe to school this morning?

PAUL

What?

ANN

Gabe. Your son. He's still in bed and it's 8am. School started 30 minutes ago. So.

PAUL

No! No no. I let him sleep in this morning. I'm taking him to the zoo.

ANN

It's Wednesday, Paul.

PAUL

Ok. And?

ANN

And. He can't just miss school. You can't just keep him out of school when you decide that you're bored and want a play buddy to go on an adventure with.

PAUL

That's not what this is!

ANN

No? How is it then? How would you describe deciding to keep him out of school for the umpteenth time this year without telling anyone?

PAUL

It's not like that. It's educational! And he doesn't need school anyway! I can teach him more here. I don't like the institution of school. What it's become. It's just memorization and regurgitation, not actual learning. You know that.

ANN

Do I? Do I know that? I don't feel like I know that. I feel like I want our son to have an education and not have his teacher's hate us or think his dad's nuts just because at this moment in time he's decided he's off school. Even though he was very much so ON school only a year ago. When he was a TEACHER. I feel like it's your world again and you didn't bother to tell anyone else what you decided to do in your world today and so now we're all left scrambling trying to clean up the mess. Again. Feels more like when you drove to New Orleans last summer. And didn't tell anyone.

PAUL

My sister lives there! I hadn't seen her in a year!

ANN

You didn't tell her you were coming! You just showed up after after a 24 hour drive! And you didn't tell me you were going until you had Gabe in his fucking carseat! You would have left without telling any of us if I hadn't gotten home early from class. I can't do this again, Gabe. I can't do this. You can't just make decisions about our kids without consulting me first. You absolutely cannot.

PAUL

Little dramatic aren't we, dear? I'm just taking him to the zoo so he can see the spider monkeys. Maybe if you shut your mouth once in awhile you wouldn't have to take all those early morning aerobics classes to work off those cookies and you could take him yourself. You know, I've read that eating a lot before bed can really effect your sleeping patterns.

(long beat)

ANN

Jesus you're evil.

PAUL

Evil, you say? You didn't think I was evil when I was giving up my career to stay here with you.

*Ann stares at Paul without saying a word. She sighs and lowers her head.*

ANN

Yes. Giving up your career. For me. That's how that went. So I'll just bring Gabe then?

*She exits. Lights out.*

SCENE 4

*2013. Jess and Ann set up Gabe's apartment bedroom. Gabe and Natalie (20's). She stands a distance from him that's just close enough to be friendly, but not close enough to be intimate. Natalie is genuinely upset. She's timid but firm.*

NATALIE

I'm so sorry. I don't mean to hurt you. I just. It's me. I'm just not ready for this right now. It's just not working for me. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. It's just not going to work out, Gabe.

GABE

For who? Not going to work out for who? Seems like it's going to work out just fine for you.

(beat)

No? It won't? Am I missing something?

NATALIE

Gabe, you just fluctuate back and forth so much.

GABE

I'm sorry? I fluctuate?

NATALIE

You're so intelligent and you have so much creative energy I just feel like I can't keep up. Like there's no room for me.

GABE

What? What are you talking about?

NATALIE

Sometimes I feel like I'm standing too close to the sun when I'm with you, you know? You're so... bright.

GABE

Is that?...

NATALIE

Yes, it's a compliment.

GABE

Oh it is? I wasn't sure. Because of the bumbling and the murmuring under your breath. And the shifting back and forth on your feet. A compliment. Got it. Go on.

NATALIE

It's just a little too intense for me. Sometimes when I look at you I can tell you're not there really. Like your brain is cooking up something amazing but you can't let anyone in on the secret.

GABE

Well that's adorable. Like you have any clue what it's like to be in my head for one fucking second. I'd love to get inside your head. What's it like in there? You like your dull life? What's it like to just be you and have everyone be ok with that? You don't want to know what's in here. You don't want your worst enemies to know what's in here.

You're sorry? You can go fuck yourself Natalie. I don't need this shit.

I have enough right here to deal with without having some harpee breathing down my neck about 'fluctuations'. The fuck is that. I'm sorry if it's too much for you. You should probably find someone that's a little more suited to your pace then. Maybe someone from Alabama or the short bus or something. More suited to your speed.

*Gabe is staring at her with an intensity that clearly makes her a bit uneasy.*

NATALIE

Yes. I'm sorry. I just. *Long beat.* I just. Ha! Jesus Christ. I don't know, Gabe. I can't... put my finger on it. I have zero proof of this. But I know in my bones I could never fucking trust you.

*She exits.*

GABE

Smart girl.

*Gabe is left on stage by himself. He stands for a moment then he starts walking around the room. Aimlessly but with energy.*

*He walks over to his dresser and dumps out the contents of his sock drawer onto the floor. He gets on the ground and starts rifling through. He finds an envelope with ticket stubs in it and dumps the tickets out. He starts organizing piles of the tickets, but only gets halfway through.*

*He stands up and walks over to his closet, ripping through the suit jackets with a fury. He tries one on. Too tight. He throws it on the floor. He tries another one on. Throws it on the floor. A third, a fourth.*

*Then he pulls his pants down and puts on running shorts and sneakers without taking his suit jacket off.*

*He gets back down on the floor with the ticket stubs and starts organizing them again. He can't find one in particular.*

GABE (CONT'D)

What the hell? Where is it? Where is it??

*He runs over to his closet and pulls out a big box of files labeled "DAD'S SHIT". He starts to frantically go through the folders. Paper is flying everywhere.*

*He's reading little bits and then pulling out another file.*

*He goes back to his socks on the floor and starts folding a couple of them, then goes back to the files on the floor. He pulls out a book and flips through it.*

*He jumps up, does a couple of stretches and jogs out the door with the book in hand, suit jacket on. Natalie comes back on stage and starts cleaning the room up. Jess and Ann/Viola join her. She exits.*

SCENE 5

*Nancy's office. With Gabe.*

NANCY

What do you think Gabe three is like?

GABE

I'm sorry?

NANCY

Gabe three.

GABE

I heard you, Nancy. I just don't know who that is.

NANCY

Yes you do. The one in the middle.

GABE

The one in the middle. Ohhhh the dull normal one. Sure sure. I know him. He sucks.

NANCY

But he has friends. And a job.

GABE

Ohhhh, she zings! No, Gabe 1 has friends. Gabe 2 stares a lot and Gabe 3 doesn't really exist.

NANCY

Doesn't he? Isn't he sitting in front of me?

GABE

Well this is fun.

NANCY

Wouldn't you say that Gabe three is sitting in this room right now? You're not particularly wild at the moment and I think it's safe to say you're currently not on the verge of suicide. So that eliminates one and two. Gabe three, no?

GABE

By process of elimination. Sure.

NANCY

Gabe, have you heard of bipolar disorder?

*(beat)*

GABE

Yes. I have. I believe Bradley Cooper and Claire Danes played charming versions of this? They organize things a lot, post-it notes become like a love language and in the end dancing saves everyone?

NANCY

Technically that's accurate in Hollywood. But here in the real world, it's not really that simple. Bipolar 1 is represented by intense mood swings usually beginning with uncontrollable mania, something I know you've experienced several times and is often followed by deep and debilitating depression, usually lasting a couple weeks or so.

GABE

Sounds fun.

NANCY

It certainly can be. It can also be debilitating and the cause of lost jobs, friends, loved ones.

GABE

I see. Double edged then. Say I had it. You want me to get rid of which Gabe? One or two?

NANCY

I don't want you to get rid of any of them. I'd love to see how long we can get Gabe three to stick around for though.

GABE

So you want me to be like everyone else.

NANCY

Don't you?

GABE

Do you like being normal? Seriously. That's a genuine question. Because I feel like God sometimes, Nancy. And I don't mean that figuratively. I feel like fucking God. There is absolutely nothing you can do to take me down when I'm up. I'm the funniest person in the room, the most attractive, certainly the smartest and by far the most talented. Why would I ever want to get rid of that?

NANCY

Because you tried to kill yourself last year. And this year. And I'm worried about next year. Your wife moved out and you're currently unemployed. Again. Because you threatened your boss with a broom stick after he told you you were making the other employees nervous.

GABE

Hm. But don't you feel at all jealous that I have a cure to the mediocre redundancy that is normal people's lives? I have that. I experience total and complete self confidence. Do you even know what that's like? I can look in the mirror and be one hundred percent, crystal clear positive that I'm on top of the world.

NANCY

So can drug addicts. But it's the down that really makes me nervous for you, Gabe. Why don't you tell me what the down is like?

GABE

Sounds like you already know what the down is like. And nothing comes without a price, Nancy.

SCENE 6

*Paul's office. It's empty. We hear people yelling from offstage.*

ANN

What color is it?

PAUL

You know it's black and gold. You KNOW that Ann! God!

*He enters in a frenzy. Opening drawers, slamming them shut. Rifling through everything. Muttering to himself.*

PAUL (CONT'D)

Where is it? WHERE IS MY PEN? I put it right here yesterday! I put it RIGHT here on my desk. Where is it? I can't work without it! WHERE THE FUCK IS IT?

*Ann runs out on stage with a pen in her hand. She holds it up.*

ANN

Paul!!

PAUL

THAT'S NOT IT! Why are you trying to mess this up for me, Ann? Why don't you want me to be successful? It's like you're trying to fuck everything up. Is that what you want? DOES EVERYONE IN THIS FAMILY WANT ME TO FAIL? Did you take it? I know you took it. Because you hate me. Why don't you just kill me in my sleep then. Why don't you just smother me with a pillow in the middle of the night if you hate me so much?

*Jessica, their daughter (teens) has been standing on stage with a pen in her hand. She holds it up frantically. Right behind her is Young Gabe (8-10). He has a handful of pens in his hands. He's out of breath and crying.*

PAUL (CONT'D)

THAT'S NOT IT!!!

*He gets in Jessica's face.*

One of your friends took it didn't they. My father gave me that pen! I know one of your lazy friends took it because they thought it was worth something. Jokes on them! We're calling Beth's mom. It was her wasn't it? Was it? I know it was. It's always her.

*Jessica throws the pens on the ground and runs off stage.*

PAUL (CONT'D)

*Bends down to Young Gabe. Looks through the pens.*

This isn't your fault, son.

Your mom wants me to fail so she took the only thing that matters to me in this world and she hid it so I can't finish the ONLY OTHER THING I'VE EVER CARED ABOUT. Because she hates me. Do you hear me? Do you?

*He nods. Paul picks him up and exits the stage.*

*The women start to flit about the stage frantically looking through everything but back into that fluid choreographed way. Ann stops. She yells out in utter frustration.*

ANN

No! No. No. We're not doing this. Jessica, we're not doing this again. Get your shoes on and get your brother. We're going to the movies. Goddamn it, Paul!! Sorry honey. Just. Go get ready ok? I'll meet you in the car. Hurry.

SCENE 7

*Gabe and Jessica. 2019 Stuffy back room of a church. Organ music is heard in the background. They're sitting in two chairs side by side. They're dressed in black and sipping from coffee mugs.*

*There's a large plant between them that offers both an obstacle at times during physical contact as well as a partition for private moments.*

JESSICA

Well. At least they only mentioned God four times.

GABE

Jesus christ. It felt like the whole thing! It's the only thing he asked for! No God!! He was off God, dude. Off. God. A year ago? Fine! Talk about all the Jesuses!! All the Jesuses you can muster up. Today? What'd he say? When I die. No God talk. Quite simple. For fuck's sake.

JESSICA

Oh my God, you're literally damning us right now. If that's a thing. Which, with our recent luck I'm unwilling to take a chance on. Please. No fucks or damns or "what a shitty reverends" for like two more hours. We're perfectly capable.

GABE

Sorry. Right. Fuck. Shit!... Sorry.

JESSICA

We tried, Gabe. We're literally sitting IN a church right now. Which is more for the people he left behind than for him, really. Four mentions of God seems like they put in a pretty good effort. I mean the entire service was built off Carl Saigon's 'Pale Blue Dot', for Chriiiiiistina's sake. They tried.

It was nice to see mom there. He would've loved that.

GABE

Yeah.

JESSICA

No?

GABE

I said yeah!

JESSICA

Dude.

GABE

Sorry.

*Jessica reaches around the plant and puts her hand on top of Gabe's. She squeezes. They both tilt their heads sideways. It's weird.*

GABE (CONT'D)

Mmmmm. It's weird, Jess.

JESSICA

Shut up. You'll take it.

*They sit and stare ahead for awhile.*

GABE

I found something.

JESSICA

Uhh, like a clue? Like we found a treasure map?

GABE

No, you... twerp. Like a thing. I found a thing.

JESSICA

Twerp. This is...

GABE

In place of 'No you retarded assssholomio...'

JESSICA

Twerp! I'll take it. So, you found a thing!

GABE

Yes. Dad left this journal on a bookcase in his study and I shoved it under my shirt when we were there the other day.

JESSICA

Sure sure. That seems totally appropriate and like something a normal person would do.

GABE

Shut up. I was desperate. I saw it and I knew it was meant for me. Ok?

JESSICA

It had your name on it?

GABE

Holy fuck Jess!!!! No, it didn't have my name on it! I just knew I was supposed to have it! Jesus!

JESSICA

Oh my God, Gabe. How are you married to a human, you total lunatic?

(Beat. He knows he did wrong)

GABE

I can successfully keep a solid best-foot-forward for like a year.

JESSICA

Ohhh! And then you lay down the boom of crazy once she's emotionally attached.

GABE

Correct. But I don't know how much longer I can keep it together anyway.

JESSICA

Hm. I feel like that's actually excellent advice for some of my girlfriends. Just so we're clear... you married up. If you fuuudge it up, I'll kill you.

GABE

I'm sure I'd kill myself first.

JESSICA

So funny. Super effing funny, Gabe.

GABE

Anyway... I found this thing.

*Gabe stands up and goes to his coat hanging on a coat rack. He takes a journal out of his coat pocket and sits back down and opens the book.*

Listen to this shiiiiiiiza.

JESSICA

Amazing. Like watching a baby bird learn to fly.

GABE

Shut up. K.

(he starts to read)

There's very little chance this narrative will survive in its original form on the way toward a more comprehensive report, but maybe it will serve to get me started. There's little doubt my sisters will never do it since the thoughts of my father, which are all that remain are mostly painful and rarely expressed. Simply speaking of him releases him back into the world.. to pollute. And the gate keepers - his children- are sick of the smell. Determined to keep the lid secured. Unfortunately, it can't be done.

JESSICA

What am I listening to right now?

GABE

Shut up! Just shh.

All around us are boarding platforms we find ourselves on (through the wandering of our mind) where without a step, we're whisked away to some event in our past at the speed of memory. We tend to revisit the same places.

In the case of our father, unless we make in-roads toward a fuller, more honest picture of the man, we will live out the rest of our lives as victims, never to remember the good times we had ... with our good father.

JESSICA

Dude. What is this?

GABE

I think he was writing a memoir maybe?

JESSICA

What? Well where's the fudging rest?

GABE

You know he couldn't finish anything, really.

JESSICA

Yeah, that's not actually true. He finished tons of shhtuff. He just had a million projects going at once so it seemed like he didn't. Treehouse?

GABE

Oh. True.

JESSICA

Entire gymnastics set made from scrap wood in the back yard after I said I wanted to be Mary Lou Retton?

GABE

Totally true.

JESSICA

Weird book of one million dots he made on the effing typewriter to better illustrate the actual quantity of the number one million to us because who the hell knows why?

GABE

You swore.

JESSICA

Did I really though? I plead locational reference.

GABE

Ok ok. You're right. He finished things. But. Why the heck didn't he finish this?

JESSICA

Too painful?

GABE

Um he loved to punish himself.

JESSICA

If he could admit he was wrong, yeah! Otherwise, absolutely not. He'd die before he apologized.

(long awkward beat)

GABE

Well, I don't know why he couldn't finish it, but the craziest part is what comes after the memoir. It's suicide letters, Jess. It's like he was writing his memoir and then just started writing a letter for every day he wanted to die instead.

JESSICA

That's so dark, dude.

GABE

I know. But... do you think?

JESSICA

What?

GABE

Nothing.

JESSICA

What?

GABE

Nothing Jess! Jesus!

*(beat)*

JESSICA

You have more of his stuff?

GABE

Yeah, mom gave me a big box labeled 'Dad's shit' like ten years ago.

They weren't speaking at the time so she asked me to give it to him, but he'd just barged into my apartment the day before screaming that I had to pay him back every cent of my college tuition because he decided I hadn't tried hard enough in high school and didn't deserve to go anymore. So like... fudge him straight to heck and back. I'm getting quite good at this. I should swear less.

JESSICA

Ha! So amazing.

GABE

Not the word I'd use to describe it, but yes... amazing in it's own super fun abusive way. So I decided to burn all his stuff obviously. But then I forgot and just shoved it in my closet. I went through it like one time I think.

JESSICA

That'll show him.

GABE

Yep.

JESSICA

Think we should go through it all?

GABE

It's fragments of shit in the box though. I think we should go through his other stuff. Like... in his study. There has to be more. I mean. Why not, right? What's the harm now? Not like he'll care or anything.

JESSICA

Ew. What if he's watching us right now?

GABE

Oh he is. He's cursing us out for not following the only real last wishes he had.

JESSICA

Well. We'll add a couple points back to House Paul, then. Ok? He's still deeply in debt to House Traumatized Family.

GABE

Yeah that's fair. Ok! Here we go. Time to small talk with people we haven't seen in five years and gush about what an amazing person he was. Thanks for the whiskey. Life saver.

JESSICA

I got you. Bring it in.

*They cheers, swig the last drop, stand, set the mugs down, quick hug, clap their hands in unison.*

GABE AND JESSICA (CONT'D)

Break.

SCENE 8

*STAGE RIGHT- Gabe's bedroom. 2019. Gabe is laying on his side facing the audience while Jess and Viola set the stage around him. He's completely motionless. It's dark and the room is in absolute chaotic disarray. Bottles of liquor strewn around the floor, canvases. Train sounds surround him. There's a window with a ledge that's open next to his bed and an easel with an empty canvas on it. Street signs buzzing and music playing down on the street below. We're clearly several stories up. Life is happening around him. He remains nearly motionless the entire time, except to slowly sit up and read the letter sitting next to him over and over. Then slink back under the covers. Gabe is in excruciating pain. It's unbearable to look at light. Unbearable to lift his head up. Everything hurts. He's in the grip of a deep and paralyzing depression.*

*STAGE LEFT- Train station. There's a train board and a bench. 1975. Paul and Ann come bursting onto stage laughing and out of breath. They look much younger.*

ANN

Oh my gosh, Paul!! Ahhh!! You're so funny!

PAUL

And then I said: Why don't you just call me Suzy then! Kill two birds with one stone!

*Ann laughs and doubles over.*

ANN

You did NOT! Ohhh my stomach! My stomach hurts from laughing! Ohhh my gosh. You're too much. Ohhh my goodness.

PAUL

No, YOU'RE too much. You're too much, Miss Danton. You're more than I ever could've dreamed of.

*He kisses her. They sway back and forth for a moment. Paul looks around for the train schedule.*

I don't want to go on this interview. I don't even like this job, I don't think. Do I want to be an adjunct professor? Really? Isn't that just like a fake teacher?

ANN

Paul. You're going to the campus. Oh my gosh. You're going. It's such a great opportunity! You were gushing about this job last week. Let's find the train board and see what track you're on. This is so exciting! I love trains. With the conductors and the hats. They're so magical. Without a single step you're just whisked away to another event. One second you're here, then the next you're somewhere completely different. I love them. Ok... Oh there it is. Over here!

*She turns to go and Paul grabs her hand to spin her back around. She laughs. He dips her and when she comes back up and they're inches from each other's face he says...*

PAUL

Marry me.

ANN

Ha! Stop it. You're ridiculous.

PAUL

I'm serious, Ann. Marry me. We can whisk all over the place together. From one place to the next. Or stay right here. I don't care. But marry me.

(long beat)

ANN

What?

PAUL

Marry me, for pete's sake!! I won't go. I'll stay here and we'll get married and I'll find a job here.

ANN

Paul. That's not funny. We've only known each other a few weeks.

PAUL

Annabelle Marie Danton, you are the most beautiful thing I've ever laid eyes on. I wake up every single morning and have to make myself wait to call you. I don't want to wait to call you in the morning! I want to reach over and kiss you and say 'good morning my queen' every single day. And I knew that the first time I saw you. I knew I wanted to wake up every single day with you for the rest of my life the exact second you reached out your hand and shook mine with that weirdly strong man grip of yours. I don't care if it's only been a few weeks. When you know, you know. And I KNOW. So. Marry me.

ANN

You know I'm self conscious about my hands! Paul. Oh my gosh this is insane.

PAUL

You don't want to marry me?

ANN

No! I. No I don't mean no! I mean...

PAUL

Because I can go right now! The train is pulling in soon, Ann! If you don't want to marry me I can get on this train right now and just disappear. If that's what you want! Someone else will marry me if you don't want to, so no pressure. You want me to get on it? I don't want to live my life without you. But I'll get on this train if you want me to. It's pulling in, make up your mind!

ANN

Um. No! No I don't want you to do that! No, just. Oh my gosh. This is INSANE!

(beat)

Ok! Ok. Ok. Yes. Sure, I mean. Yes. Ok.

PAUL

Yes?

ANN

Yes. I'll marry you!! Ahhhhhh!!!

PAUL

Yes? You're sure?

ANN

Yes!! I said yes! I'm... sure! I'm sure. I'm sure.

PAUL

Well hot damn!! You hear that everyone? She said YES!

*He scoops her up and swings her all over the place. They almost knock into people in the station but are laughing so hard they don't notice. Paul steps up onto the bench and cups his hands.*

You hear that everyone! I'm marrying the woman of my dreams. Right here! This one! This lady right here!

*He jumps down and they kiss again.*

ANN

Oh my gosh, ok. Paul we have to get you onto this train! Let's go!

PAUL

Oh no. Are you kidding me? I can't go now! I can't move away from you! I'm staying here!

ANN

Paul! The job! We'll figure it out. I can move maybe after next semester or something. We'll work it out!

PAUL

No way, my queen. Not a chance. I'm here with you now.

ANN

But. The job, Paul. This is a great job.

PAUL

I didn't want it anyway! You're my family now. You! And me! Come on! Let's celebrate! We're getting married! We have to tell everyone!

*Paul grabs Ann's hand and runs off stage with her. She looks back just before exiting, almost as if she sees Gabe in bed. But we can't be sure.*

*Gabe is left in his bed alone as the lights dim on the train station. He slowly sits up in bed and walks over to his easel. He begins to paint slowly and painfully. The painting is angry. It's red. It's black. It's messy. Gabe is crying while he paints for a minute or so. At some point he paints the words "I have to fly" on the wall. Then he drops the paint brush to the floor and walks over to the window. He steps up onto the window ledge and stares out.*

BLACKOUT.

SCENE 9

*STAGE LEFT. Gabe's apartment. 2019. We hear knocking at the door, then silence. Then we hear scratching at the door and see the knob jiggling. The door gives way and Ann tip toes in with a credit card in hand. While she's entering the stage, Jessica starts setting up STAGE RIGHT. Bart's bathroom. 1952.*

ANN

Honey? Gabriel, sweetheart? Helloooooo?

*There's no answer. She knew there wouldn't be. She looks around and takes in the scene, which is disgusting to say the least. Liquor bottles everywhere, trash, an empty canvas. She walks over to his desk and starts going through things quietly. She finds journals and pauses only momentarily before opening them. The gravest of betrayals and she knows it. She's determined though. She starts reading. She falls to her knees quietly crying but keeps going.*

*STAGE RIGHT. Bart and Young Paul (7ish) are in their bathroom. 1952. There is an empty window frame hanging in front of them, which is the mirror. We see them through the frame. Young Paul is sitting on the countertop watching his dad shave in the mirror. He's not old enough to shave, but he's pretending nonetheless. He has a play razor and is miming his father as Bart carefully instructs. It's a rare, sober and endearing moment and Young Paul is infatuated with his father. They both have lather on their faces.*

YOUNG PAUL

When does the smell good stuff come? Before or after the whip cream?

BART

What's that now?

YOUNG PAUL

The smell good stuff. The stuff that makes your face smell good.

BART

Ohhhhh. The aftershave you mean.

YOUNG PAUL

After you shave what?

BART

(he laughs)

No it's called AFTER shave. Old Spice. You splash it on after the shaving cream and after the razor and after the water.

YOUNG PAUL

The whip cream?

(beat)

BART

Exactly. After the whip cream. The second whip cream. Watch.

YOUNG PAUL

Two whip creams?! Shaving is so great.

*Young Paul sticks his tongue out to the side and tries to lick his own face.*

BART

Pauly, don't eat that you dummy. You'll be real sorry, I'm tellin' ya. You hear me?

YOUNG PAUL

Yes, sir.

*Bart wipes off his own lather with a hot towel, then applies another coat of lather with the brush.*

You have to do it twice. Once WITH the grain. And once against the grain.

YOUNG PAUL (CONT'D)

What's a grain?

BART

It's the way your whiskers grow on your face. See how when you rub your hand on my face some hair is smooth one way and some is smooth the other way?

*Young Paul reaches up to feel and Bart lowers his face to his hand. Paul rubs one way and then the other.*

YOUNG PAUL

Ow, it's sharp that way!

BART

That's because whiskers don't grow like regular hairs. They go in all different ways. So's you gotta shave in one direction and then again the other way.

YOUNG PAUL

Dad. You're not a cat. You don't have whiskers.

*Bart bursts out laughing.*

BART

Well. You got me there, Pauly boy.

*He picks up the razor again, slowly shaves and eyes Young Paul in the mirror who is doing exactly the same thing.*

BART (CONT'D)

Watch. When you do it twice it means you get as close as possible. You want smooth cheeks and chin so you don't scratch your lady's pretty face when you kiss her.

YOUNG PAUL

Ew! If I don't shave does that mean I don't have to kiss ladies?

BART

Trust me. You'll want to kiss ladies, boy.

YOUNG PAUL

No I won't.

BART

Ok. You'll see. Your mom's face gets scratched up real good when I'm all stubbly. But sometimes she don't mind. I try to keep it clean though, so's I keep from hurting her.

YOUNG PAUL

Yeah daddy, I don't like it when you hurt her.  
(beat)

BART

I don't hurt her much. You've never seen me hurt her. She hurts me a lot more often.

YOUNG PAUL

Then why does she cry all the time?

BART

When does she cry?

YOUNG PAUL

After you yell at her. And she falls. She told me that she falls sometimes after you yell at her because her heart hurts and she gets clumsy when her heart hurts.

*(long beat. Bart keeps shaving and has a hard time looking at Paul. He starts whistling to himself.)*

BART

Well I try real hard not to yell at her. Real hard, Pauly. I don't like hurting her... Do you?

YOUNG PAUL

What? No I'd never hurt mama. I love her more than anything in the world. She's bright and shiny like the sun. And she smells good. All the time. Like cookies and bacon.

BART

You love her more than me?

*(long beat)*

YOUNG PAUL

No.

BART

That's what I thought. Now come on, help me wipe this all off. Then you can put the Old Spice on.

YOUNG PAUL

Why do you like old spices?

BART

*(beat)*

Cuz they smell good, boy. And your mom likes how good they smell. Now stop asking so many questions and hand me that bottle right there. Lesson's over today. And wipe that off your face.

*He tousles Young Paul's hair, helps him down, then flips him upside down and carries him off stage that way, Young Paul squealing and laughing. They exit. Lights dim on the bathroom.*

*STAGE LEFT. Ann closes the journal and keeps looking around the room. She finds a single piece of paper on his desk.*

ANN

Hm. No date. Dear Jess, If I had to describe what it's like to be in my head for just one minute I'd say this. There's another version of me living in there and I can't get him out. He's the only one I'm truly terrified of. Because he's going to kill me and I can't stop him.

There are other versions of me, but this one hates me with every breath I take. He thinks Gabe 1 and Gabe 3 are enemies who have to die. He doesn't understand though that if he wins, there won't be any Gabe's left. We'll all be gone.

We'll all fly for a minute and then we'll crash together. I guess that's life though. A slow crash and burn.

Maybe I'll come back as an eagle so I can fly forever. Maybe there actually is a God and he'll have mercy on me because he sees I've suffered enough. Maybe he'll make me an eagle. Please make me an eagle.

I don't think it hurt. I think I just flew for awhile. And I think you'll be relieved anyway. I wish I could plug my ears so I couldn't hear the resounding sigh of relief once everyone learns I'm gone, but I'll probably be flying all around, so maybe I will hear. That's ok. I get it. I'm sorry for who I was. Gabe 2 is probably right, honestly. He used to tell me I have to fly all the time and now he tells me I have to die. All the time. He never stops. And I'm confused which one is which. I think they're the same maybe. I know he's going to win. He already won. I'm sorry. I tried, but he won. Tell Mom it's not her fault. And tell Lucas he's not me.

Love, your bro

*Ann gasps loudly, grabs all the letters and runs off stage.*

#### SCENE 10

*Lights up as the women set up three framed mirrors hanging over three bathroom sinks. They will merely add two more to the one hanging already. These are simple small tables with an empty picture frame hanging above it, so the audience can see through. Bart enters and stands in front of his mirror center stage. He starts shaving absentmindedly, whistling the song 'Should've known better' to himself. Paul enters, stands at the mirror stage right. Starts shaving. Gabe enters, stands at the mirror stage left. Starts shaving. All three men shave exactly the same way, same facial expressions, same technique. First they're moving at their own pace, then slowly fall into rhythm with each other, perhaps the music has started playing out loud, perhaps they're in rhythm with it. Either way, it's a choreographed shave.*

*After about a minute of this Paul stops and just stares at himself. Something is happening. Something is being realized. Disgust perhaps. Fear perhaps. Sadness perhaps. Gabe stops shaving and stares at himself. Same thing. Paul and Gabe slowly look over at Bart in the middle who is continuously whistling.*

*Bart stops, taps his razor on the sink, rinses it off, slaps some aftershave on, checks his work, and walks off stage still whistling. Gabe and Paul are left just staring at their razors. BLACKOUT.*

SCENE 11

*Spotlights up on a psychiatrists office. Nancy sits in the middle with Paul on one side and Gabe on the other. She's having two separate sessions at two separate times. This is done with merely chairs.*

NANCY

Are you afraid of becoming your father?

GABE

Not really. I mean. I'd like it if my kid didn't think I was evil incarnate.

NANCY

Do you think you are your father?

PAUL

Well I don't hit my kids, if that's what you mean. And I don't wrap myself around a bottle every night. So. No. I don't.

NANCY

Do you think that's what I mean?

PAUL

There's this photo of my dad from 1945. He's about thirty or so and he's sitting in a rocking chair on our front porch with me in his lap. He's got a white t-shirt on and an Elvis curl in his hair and this smirk on his face. Like he was proud to be showing me off. Happy even. He looked like the picture of contentment, except this one thing. His eyes. The intensity of his gaze. Like he's totally alone. And eager to bring someone down there with him. This desperate, unhinged evil lurking underneath, just waiting for the perfect opportunity to murder someone's happiness. My sister was joking about how she couldn't believe how similar we looked recently. She was laughing about our sideways smile and our hair and our ears and then she said 'I always forget you totally have his eyes too.' She was reminiscing and I was having a fucking panic attack next to her.

Why'd I never notice that before? I mean. I know I have his eyes. But. It meant something different that day. It was evil.

NANCY

And? Gabe? Do you think that same 'evil', as you call it... lives inside you?

*They both stare at Nancy for an uncomfortably long time.*

GABE

Well I think the real question here, Nancy is... do you?

*Lights out on the men. Nancy is left alone in the middle. She picks up her voice recorder.*

NANCY

I'm still in shock that Ann and Paul chose to keep Paul's illness from the children. It would have been instrumental in helping to diagnose Gabe. We could've looked at his family history and helped him to understand that communication with loved ones can be integral in finding the right support. I thought they told them. I thought at least Ann would've told the kids eventually. What the fuck, Ann.

*She stops the tape, rewinds. Plays back 'I thought at least Ann would've told the children eventually'. Then re-records-*

NANCY (CONT'D)

But I know as well as anyone. Shame is the eighth deadly sin.

*She stops the recorder. Rewinds.*

Aaaaand I can't use any of that.

SCENE 12

*STAGE RIGHT. The Johns' home. 1991. Ann and Jessica (young teen) set up a four person dinner table while Paul and Young Gabe(10ish) sit waiting at the table. STAGE LEFT Viola is setting up the Johns' bathroom. A table for a sink, a picture frame hanging as a mirror. A stool for the toilet is fine.*

*Perhaps a small bunch of flowers on the table though.  
Viola exits. Ann and Jessica sit.*

*Lights up on the dinner table, they are in the middle  
of eating.*

JESSICA

Because Nirvana is life. Jesus.

ANN

Language.

JESSICA

Jesús, Gabe.

ANN

It's the same thing in Spanish, Jessica.

GABE

Like, nirvana the place?

PAUL

That is one way to look at it, actually!

JESSICA

I can't even sit at the same table as you. You're like the anti-cool. Like a black hole of cool. I don't want to catch it. Can you slide over?

*Gabe reaches out to poke her.*

JESSICA (CONT) (CONT'D)

Don't touch me.

GABE

But seriously what kind of nirvana are we talking about here?

PAUL

Gabe. Come on.

You know what she's talking about. Don't egg her on. She's talking about the transcendent state of no suffering or desire or sense of self.

A state of perfect happiness and bliss. The final step to paradise for every Buddhist. Also called 'Moksha'.

ANN

Paul.

GABE

Ohhhh. That's what I thought she was talking about. I just wasn't sure because there was some guy Kurt she was blah blahing about. But maybe Kurt's there? Waiting for you? In your perfect place? Hmmm?

*Jess picks up her dinner roll and throws it directly at his face.*

GABE (CONT'D)

DUDE!

ANN

No. Absolutely not.

PAUL

Ohhhh!! What are we doing here? No no. Noooo ma'am. You know your mom doesn't like any fun around these parts!

*Everyone starts to laugh with the exception of Ann. Paul then picks up a spoonful of carrots and chucks it at Gabe's face. They erupt into screams and laughter and the food starts flying. It gets incredibly loud and Ann is just staring at everyone. Paul stands up on his chair with a bowl of spaghetti over his head and screams...*

PAUL (CONT'D)

They're all going to laugh at you!!

*He dumps the spaghetti on Jess who is screaming with delight.*

ANN

Paul!! Jesus!

PAUL

Boooo!! Boooooooo to mom! Booooo! Party pooper!!!

## JESS AND GABE

Booooooooo!!

*Everyone is booing and giving the thumbs down sign to Ann. She looks around at the chaos and reluctantly joins in on the laughter for a minute. Then she stands up and walks to the bathroom.*

*There's a picture frame hanging as a mirror. Ann stands in front of it. She puts her hands on the table and breathes. She's exhausted in every sense of the word.*

*She straightens back up and stares in the mirror. She turns to the side. She sucks in her stomach and pulls her dress tight. She lets out her stomach and starts playing with it almost like a piece of dough she's kneading. A piece of dough she absolutely hates. She starts panicking while she's prodding at herself. She pulls at her neck skin. She pulls at her arms. She hears her family laughing in the other room and turns on the faucet. She stares in the mirror.*

ANN

Just go. You can do it. Just go. Gooooooooo.

*She silently screams at herself. She hears her family laughing in the other room again and starts laughing, which turns to sobs.*

*She sticks her fingers down her throat and begins to wretch. When she comes back up she's shaking quite a bit and uses the sink to steady herself. She towels off her face, perks her skin back up and stares at herself for a moment longer. Then she lifts her eyes and her face back up and forces herself to smile. She exits slowly back into the dining room. Back into the chaos.*

*Everyone is now on the floor playing Egyptian ratscrew, an incredibly loud, violent and competitive card game. If you don't know it, choose another obnoxiously loud game to play.*

*She stares at the dinner table and the room which are in absolute disarray and starts cleaning it up. Alone.*

## SCENE 13

*Paul's study. 2019. We hear knocking at the door, then silence. Then we hear scratching at the door and see the knob jiggling. The door gives way and Gabe and Jess tip-toe in, Jess with a credit card in hand.*

GABE

It's alarming how easy that was for you.

JESS

Science camp. What do you think we did all summer long?

GABE

Apparently mastering the art of breaking and entering.

JESS

And sleeping with our teachers and smoking crack.

GABE

What?

JESS

Juuuust kidding.  
(she coughs while saying...)

Sort of.

*They both start looking through things but Jess is really enjoying it. His desk, drawers, bookshelves.*

GABE

Who ARE you?!

JESS

A saint.

GABE

The patron saint of crime, maybe.

JESS

Ok, so... "The Aunts" said they were running to Target for a couple things. That's it. I figure we've got-

GABE

- It's "The Aunts". A few things means an hour. At least. Maybe two.

JESS

True. I just don't want them to catch us. They're weird about his shit.

GABE

We're his fucking kids! You'd think someone would be like "Oh Paul's lovely, fucked up children!... here are some of his things he'd want you to have".

JESS

Yeah. You'd think. And yet here we are, with no other alternative, practically FORCED to partake in criminal activity. It's monstrous.

GABE

Why are you smiling?

JESS

What? Oh. I get the smiling in really sad and uncomfortable situations thing. I thought you knew that. Remember when Powder Puff got hit by a car? I started laughing? And you punched me?

GABE

Oh I thought you were just being an asshole.

*(beat)*

JESS

Well. I had to hide my face during dad's eulogy. It's horrifying.

GABE

You're a monster.

*(beat while they rummage)*

Maybe The Aunts are trying to protect us?

JESS

From what?

GABE

I dunno. From who he really was?

*Jess exits into another room. We can't see her. She yells from offstage.*

JESS

We grew up in that house! I think we're pretty much experts by now. It's fucking weird we have to break in, Gabe. I don't know why no one trusts us.

*(beat)*

GABE

No. Me either. Total mystery.

*Gabe opens a drawer and finds a folder labeled "Jessica" on it. He starts reading.*

GABE (CONT'D)

Jess! C'mere! This one...

*His eyes get wider and wider as he scans it quickly.*

Oh my fucking God.

*Jess comes back in the room. Gabe hides the folder behind his back.*

JESS

Find something? ... What?... What?

GABE

No nothing. Did you find anything?

JESS

What's behind your back?

GABE

Nothing.

JESS

Gabe.

GABE

What.

JESS

What the hell? What is it?

*She walks up to him, reaches behind his back to grab it. They struggle for a second.*

JESS (CONT'D)

Dude, it has my name on it! Give it to me! Jesus!

GABE

No, I don't think you should read it. Seriously. Something was wrong with him Jess. Like seriously wrong.

JESS

Yeah. He was bipolar. Something was super intensely wrong with him.

GABE

What did you say?

JESS

He was bipolar?

*(beat)*

GABE

Who told you that?

JESS

Uh, my therapist. I mean she couldn't technically diagnose him obviously but like, I've been working with her for five years and she's roughly a thousand percent positive he was bipolar. His dad was too. She said it was super common for bipolar people to be alcoholics because no one knew what it was back then, so a lot of them just tried to drown out the constant noise in their head with booze and violence. Hence... grandpa's delightful history of jaw breaking. Apparently it's genetic and our kids could totally be fucked up. Something to look forward to. Keep an eye on that Lucas, I tell ya. It's always the cute ones.

*Gabe is stunned. He stares at the floor in a daze. Jess takes the opportunity to snatch the folder from his hands.*

GABE

Fuck! Jess. Don't.

JESS

What? Shut up. It's fine.

GABE

It's not fine. We need to talk about something first, wait.

JESS

*Starts reading.*

How to describe my beautiful daughter. When I saw her the day she was born I prayed to God that I would die before her. That I wouldn't join the line of lifeless parents who lost their children too early. I knew I couldn't protect her from everything but her own life would soon dictate her decisions, her brain absorbed with friends and guys and smoke and pickled with alcohol, she runs around barefoot and barelegged and looking for validation from everyone and everything except the one person who really matters. Parents waiting for their children to call them like birds waiting for their mate to come back home.

What the fuck is happening right now? What is this?

GABE

Yeah, you should stop reading.

JESS

*She picks up the pace as she reads. It's a rant.*

Parents waiting for their children to call them and bodies decaying in the ground waiting for their final moment on this earth until they turn to dust and go back to where they came from. Parents waiting for their children to call them and wives taking up space in the room and breathing oxygen that should be reserved for intelligence and children waiting for their parents to bail them out and parents waiting for their children to call them and appreciate them and praying that the decaying carcass they found in the backyard isn't their own heart and their lungs are breathing tainted oxygen because their lying wives are stealing it all and parents waiting for their fucking children to fucking call them.

Praying that the decaying bodies ARE your children so you can just go back to where you came from and be quiet. For once. Jessica... May she rot in hell.

*Silence. No one breathes. Jess just stares at the paper. After a long moment.*

JESS (CONT'D)

Well then.

GABE

Jess. He didn't mean it.

JESS

Yes, it seemed as if he didn't mean that. Sure. That's what I took away as well.

*Jess slowly walks out of the room. We hear her clanking things around then she comes back with a bottle of whiskey.*

GABE

It's 11am.

JESS

I just read a letter from my dad where he wished death on me.

GABE

Ok that's not exactly what it said. It said 'may she rot in hell'. It's different.

(beat)

Fine. Pour em.

*Jess pours out two shots. They cheers, slam the shot glasses on the desk.*

JESS

To dad!! May he rot in hell.

GABE

Come on.

*They shoot them. Jess then pours herself another shot, shoots it, then throws her shot glass across the room into the wall. She stares right at Gabe.*

GABE (CONT'D)

Jesus!

*Jess picks up the pencil jar on the desk, throws it into the wall. She picks up a book, throws it against the wall. She takes out the top drawer of his desk and hurdles it across the room. Gabe just watches wide eyed.*

JESS

Fuck YOU!!!! Fuck you fuck you fuck you fuck you, you absolute fucking lunatic fuck you!!

GABE

Jess!

*She takes the bird cage and smashes it repeatedly on the ground.*

GABE (CONT'D)

JESS!! JESSICA! STOP!!!

*She stops completely out of breath. She grabs the whiskey bottle and slides down the wall. Gabe walks over and slides down next to her.*

GABE (CONT'D)

Feel better?

JESS

Whew!!! You know, I really do?

*They sit in silence for a minute. He picks up a bottle of cologne on the ground near them.*

GABE

God I can't believe he wore this shit his whole life.

JESS

Loved those old spices.

*He opens it. They both lean in and take a big whiff. Jess starts to sob and Gabe holds her. They cry together for a moment. Jess reaches into the desk drawer and finds another folder. She finds a folder with the name Ann on it.*

JESS (CONT'D)

Ann. Ohhhhhh boy. This one should be good. I mean for SURE this is full of love letters right? If mine wished death on me, I can't imagine what mom's says.

*She starts to look through the folder.*

GABE

My therapist said I have bipolar disorder.

JESS

....

GABE

Melanie left me six months ago.

JESS

Oh my God wait. Hold on. My brain is still exploding from the first thing. Please hold on. What?

GABE

I've tried to kill myself seven times.

JESS

Excuse me?! What the fuck is happening right now?

GABE

My therapist says I have bipolar disorder, Melanie left me six months ago and I tried to kill myself seven times. That's all the things.

JESS

.... Wait. Just. Wait. I'm having an out of body experience. Hold on. What exactly are you saying right now?

GABE

Jessica. Those fucking things. I'm saying the things that just came out of my mouth. Those fucking things.

JESS

When?

GABE

When what?!

JESS

When did you try to...

GABE

You don't have to tip toe around it. Every June for the last seven years.

JESS

No fucking way.

GABE

My car accident.

JESS

No.

GABE

June 2013. My hiking accident.

JESS

Gabe.

GABE

June 2014. The accidental alcohol poisoning.

JESS

Fuck you.

GABE

June 2017.

JESS

Stop it. Stop it.

*Jess stands up, unsure of where to go and what to do with herself.*

GABE

Doesn't really matter anyway. I'm really bad at it apparently. Melanie left me because I threatened her with a frying pan. She was making Lucas breakfast and I just snapped. I don't even remember why. She looked so scared. I could've killed her. I couldn't stop it. I couldn't stop the rage. It was like a runaway train.

(beat)

If I don't figure out how to fix myself she's taking him away forever. She said I'm unsafe to be around. Which. I dunno.

JESS

YOU ALMOST LEFT ME WITHOUT A DAD AND A BROTHER?! How fucking selfish are you?

GABE

I didn't know he was going to die Jessica! How could I have known that? How could I possibly know that he'd sit down to watch Mash re-runs one night and never wake up?

JESS

That doesn't make it ok for you to check out, you fucking idiot!

GABE

I'm sorry. I just. You can't possibly know what it's like to be in my head.

JESS

Why don't you tell me then? You're not the only one who lived with him, you know. He fucked me up too.

GABE

Yeah but... now I know I'm fucked up all on my own.

JESS

I guess it makes sense.

GABE

What.

JESS

Mom asked me about you awhile back. Before dad died. She said she was really worried about you because she found you furiously painting in your apartment and you didn't even say hi to her. Like, she was standing in the doorway and you wouldn't even acknowledge her at all. She yelled your name a bunch of times and you screamed at her to get the fuck out. She called me crying and said it was really scary. I told her we all know you have some rage problems, but not to freak out about it. I just. I should've put the pieces together over the years. Of course you're bipolar. Somebody in our generation had to be, right? Just like... statistically speaking?

GABE

Statistically speaking?

JESS

Yeah, I mean. It's genetic. I'm sure there are other people in our family that have it, cousins and shit and we just don't talk about it. I'm sorry I wasn't here. I should've seen it. I should've fucking helped you.

GABE

Wow. Only you'd be self righteous enough to think you could help me out of this. Jesus, Jess. I'm a mess. You can't change that.

(beat)

I thought I was a genius.

JESS

Well. I mean let's not get carried away here, but yeah... you are pretty geniusy with your paintings.

GABE

No I'm not, Jess. It's a disease. Literally everything I thought I was... was a disease. I'm a fucking disease. Nothing I ever painted was even real. I'm one giant, pathetic chemical imbalance.

JESS

Gabe that's not true.

GABE

Yes it is! It's true! This whole time I thought I was different from everyone because I had this creative thing I could do and I felt like the rest of the world was a joke. I'm the joke. I'm a fucking joke. An unsafe to be around joke.

JESS

Gabe.

GABE

Jess.

JESS

Are you therapy?

GABE

Yes I'm in therapy. That's what got me into this whole mess to begin with. I could've just gone on with my life thinking I was who I was. But Nancy just fucked it all up. God I hate her.

JESS

Nancy... in the neighborhood Nancy?

GABE

The what?

JESS

She has a practice around here? Nancy Pall- something? Dad saw her for years.

GABE

Nancy Palintino. What do you mean dad saw her for years? What are you talking about?

JESS

Yeah. Dude. Don't you pay attention? He saw her when we were in middle school. I don't know about after that.

*They hear jiggling at the door, then scratching. They both pop up and try to find places to hide. One of them hides behind a curtain. It's useless.*

*Gabe grabs Jess and insists that they both stand out in the open. Hands on hips. They're ready for whatever punishment they get. Bring it on. Sort of.*

*The door opens, and we hear...*

ANN

Kate? Gloria? Anyone here? Hello??!!!!

GABE AND JESS

Mom?

*Ann tiptoes in with a credit card in hand.*

ANN

Oh! Kids! Oh my! Hi there. What. What are you doing here?! Jesus christ this place really smells like him still.

*She gets very quiet and teary eyed.*

GABE AND JESS

Oh!/ We were just/ Um/ Just/ What are YOU doing here?

ANN

Oh I just. I was just. Oh fine whatever. I wanted to say goodbye to your dad, I figured The Aunts wouldn't want me here. I just wanted to see his stuff one more time. That stupid bird cage. Oh wow. Um. What happened there?

GABE

Squirrels got inside. It was like this when we found it. Was he bipolar? Dad? Was he bipolar and you knew it and didn't tell us?

JESS

Gabe. Woah. Slow down.

*Ann doesn't answer. Gabe picks up a vase and throws it against the wall. The women scream.*

GABE

Why the FUCK would you keep something like that from us? What is wrong with you? How could you do that to me? I lost everyone I ever cared about because of who I am and you just kept it a fucking secret! You knew this whole time! Didn't you? You knew!!!

You just let me flail around not knowing what the fuck was wrong with me and trying to make the best of it?

ANN

Yes. I knew. I'm sorry. Of course I knew. I knew. I knew. I didn't tell you and I knew. Oh my god, I knew.

*Ann starts flitting around the room in a panic, picking all the books up off the ground. Picking up the pieces of broken glass. Avoiding eye contact as to save the last bit of her sanity. She's crying while she's cleaning everything. She cuts herself on glass. She doesn't stop.*

GABE

I tried to kill myself seven times. And you knew.

I'm here though. Fully intact. So. Guess I failed at that again!! I was trying to kill myself and NOBODY FUCKING CAME TO HELP ME! EVER! Not once!

ANN AND JESS

We didn't know!

GABE

Yes you did! You knew! You knew! You knew why I was so fucked up all the time and you kept it to yourself! You kept it yourself.

*Ann tries to reach for him and he shoves her away. Gabe picks up Paul's laptop and throws it across the room. Everything falls silent. Gabe sits down on the ground.*

JESS

Well. That's going to be hard to hide from the aunts, I feel.

GABE

I fucking hate you.

JESS

Dude.

GABE

Sorry.

ANN

I figured you might be. I actually thought you might be several years ago. But I didn't say anything. I was so terrified. You kids have no idea what it was like living with him. And then to think that you had it too? I just. I just couldn't take it. You don't understand. I was terrified every single day. I was terrified for my own life, your lives. My sanity. Every single moment of the day. I was just surviving. I was just trying to keep us all alive! You can't imagine how he was.

GABE AND JESS

Ummmm.

ANN

Jess, are you drunk? It's 11am.

JESS

I found a letter where dad wished death upon me. So. Yeah. I'm drunk, mom. What else is new?

*Gabe stands up and heads for the door.*

Where are you going?

GABE

I have no idea. We're a fucking mess. So. I have no idea where I'm going.

*He walks out the door.*

BLACKOUT.

SCENE 14

*Paul at Nancy's office. Chairs across from one another. Ann is sitting far stage right in the waiting room reading a book or magazine.*

PAUL

It was in my shirt pocket. It was right there. In my shirt pocket. I screamed in my daughter's face again and it was in my shirt pocket. I think she looked terrified, but I can't really remember. I came back downstairs and everyone was gone. I figure I got about three or four more times like this before they don't come back.

NANCY

It was just a pen, Paul.

PAUL

Thank you... Judy. I'm aware. It was my dad's pen though. It's basically the only thing I have left of his. Not that this should even matter, he was a fucking monster and I really want to burn anything of his I find. I was totally out of control. Again.

NANCY

I understand the need to keep something from your dad. Things can have a powerful hold on us. That's ok. But Paul, it's just a THING in the end. Your writing has nothing to do with what pen you're using to journal. And furthermore, when you're in those uncontrollable moments you don't seem able to consider how your actions will affect other people. And they very much do.

PAUL

I wish I could be inside your brain. For just a minute. Your brain seems nice. Normal. I wish someone could just fix mine. Permanently. I need someone to come in and un screw the top of my head and rewire everything in there. Just open it right up and unscramble everything that's scrambled. I hate it so much. I hate my brain.

NANCY

Well. We're working on that. I'd like to try something different this time, if you're open to it. There's a drug called Wellbutrin. They think it can really help with mood disorders.

PAUL

Fine. I guess. Let's try all the things. Why not at this point right? What's to lose? I can always throw myself off a bridge in the end anyway, right?

NANCY

That's not funny. Paul have you and Ann talked to your kids about what's going on?

PAUL

Oh no. No. No, I'm not ready for that.

NANCY

Ok, well it's very important that we keep open communication about this with them. So they understand what's going on. It can be very confusing for children to have a parent with a mental illness, especially if no one is talking about it with them.

PAUL

I'll think about it. I don't like the term mental illness.

NANCY

I understand that. We'll work on it. Did Ann bring you today?  
(he nods)

Great. Here's the prescription for Wellbutrin and I'll see you next week. Take care of yourself this week, ok?

*Paul exits the office to see Ann reading her book.  
She stands and gathers her things.*

ANN

How'd it go?

PAUL

She wants us to talk to the kids.

ANN

Well yeah. I've been saying that since you were diagnosed.

PAUL

Well that's my decision, right? Because it's my illness.

ANN

For now.

PAUL

She gave me a new prescription to try. Well... something.

ANN

Wellbutrin. I read about it last week in that magazine I started getting.

PAUL

The one about mental illnesses?

ANN

Yes, Paul. I need support. Because you're killing me.

PAUL

I hate that term mental illness.

ANN

Well.

(beat)

I'm taking Gabe to Georgie's house when we get back, so I'll get it filled for you at the pharmacy, ok? You have to start taking it tonight. And you have to take it every single day. I'm not joking. Every day. Like clockwork. Got it? I'll make you the ravioli you love.

PAUL

Because you're my queen.

*She doesn't respond. Just looks at him for a moment. Then exits. He follows.*

SCENE 15

*STAGE LEFT. Gabe and Jessica are sitting on a bench smoking a joint. 2019. Note: These are well spoken people, not stoner dudes. Try to avoid stereotypes here. STAGE RIGHT. 1952. Viola is reading Young Paul a book in bed.*

JESSICA

Did you know the metro north people, when they do the double clicky hold punch thinger madinger that they use a different animal or swooshy hole punch button or lighting bolt, or hammerstyle stamp every time? I saw a seagull once. For sure.

GABE

What?

JESSICA

The whole puncher thing. That they click super fast when they walk by. The click-click... click-click. Dude.

GABE

Yes. The click-click. It's a part of my permanent aural history, Jess. I dream about the click-click in my effing nightmares. I'm more stuck on the different animal or swooshy thing - thing. I think a seagull was mentioned?

JESSICA

Yeah! It's a thing! I rode the train for like 5 years before I noticed. Some random guy pointed it out to me... and then he asked me for a blowjob. Womp Womp.

But yeah! My mind exploded! Apparently this has been happening every single time my ticket got punched! Who knew?

GABE

A guy asked you for a blow job every time your ticket got punched?

JESSICA

(she bursts out laughing)

No! The clicker stamp thing!

GABE

Jessica, I've ridden... rode? ridden the metro north literally half my life. You're telling me...

JESSICA

I am.

GABE

There are different stamps on every single hole on my ticket for every single day?

JESSICA

There are.

GABE

No.

JESSICA

Yes.

(long beat)

GABE

No.

JESSICA

Wanna bet?

GABE

50 cents.

JESSICA

Obviously.

*(they shake)*

GABE

Maybe it's something they get assigned every time they start their shift. So everyone knows if something goes wrong they just check the clicker stamp animal. Firing by seagull, man. Brutal.

JESSICA

Or! Is it something they get to pick out before every shift? Like when you pick game pieces in Monopoly and someone says "I will only be the shoe or I'm leaving."

GABE

Probably the shoe thing. If it's even real. Which. I'm not convinced.

JESSICA

Oh that's fine for now. I'll win in the end.

GABE

Always. You do win a lot I feel. You seem almost, dare I say... fine? About dad it seems. Suspiciously so perhaps.

JESSICA

Uhhhh well Gabe, I worked my ass off in seven hundred years of therapy to get there. So.

GABE

Yeah but... like.. what'd you say?

JESSICA

That my dad totally fucked us up and that I had a sneaking suspicion - more like a terrorizing fear - that he'd die without ever apologizing or even acknowledging a single thing he did to us?

GABE

So. Exactly what happened.

JESSICA

Correct.

GABE

Hm.

JESSICA

Yep! Cried a river. Dug through poop. Gotta work hard if you wanna fly the coop!! Ha!

GABE

Stop it.

JESSICA

Gabe, I'm hilarious. Admit it.

GABE

Absolutely not.

*Lights dim on STAGE LEFT and come up on STAGE RIGHT.  
Viola and Young Paul are reading a children's book.*

VIOLA

Goodnight stars, goodnight air. Goodnight noises everywhere.  
The End.

YOUNG PAUL

Mama, I'm sorry papa made you sad tonight. I hate it when you're sad.

VIOLA

Oh sweetheart. I'm not sad. You know why? Because I have you! No matter what happens during the day I get to come upstairs and read to you and tuck you in and tell you how much I love every single little hair on your head. Except this one. This one has ketchup in it.

*She tickles him. And he laughs.*

VIOLA (CONT) (CONT'D)

I will always love every single hair on your head, Pauly. You know that right?

YOUNG PAUL

I know mama. And I will always love every single hair on your head. I wish I could make it so you were never sad.

VIOLA

But that's not your job, baby. That's my job. My job is to make sure you're never sad. And you're never scared. And you're never without ketchup.

*She kisses him on the forehead and brushes back his hair with her hands.*

VIOLA (CONT) (CONT'D)

You know your papa loves you very very much, right baby? Everybody loves you. Because you're the sweetest and the bravest and the kindest little boy in the whole world. And you're going to make people smile every day. You're going to make the world a brighter place, baby.

YOUNG PAUL

Ok, mama.

VIOLA

And you know your papa's not like that all the time. Right?

YOUNG PAUL

No, I know mama. I know. Not all the time.

BLACKOUT.