

THE BIGGER ISSUE

by

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GRADE 7 CLASSROOM

Irene, 43, and Suzy, 23, are having an intense conversation. Suzy has her head in her hands.

IRENE

What's the first rule?

SUZY

I'm sorry? I don't--

IRENE

There are rules, right? Rules a teacher has to follow. You were taught that, weren't you. Taught about the rules.

SUZY

Yeah, but they weren't numbered, so when you ask what the first one is I'm not sure what you-

IRENE

The most important one. I'm asking about the most important one.

SUZY

Well wouldn't that depend on the circumstances--

IRENE

Jesus!

SUZY

Please don't shout. It makes me really nervous.

IRENE

What's the most important rule, Suzy! The most important rule for a teacher to follow. Even a new teacher. Especially a new teacher.

SUZY

(near tears)

Well... I don't know if it's a rule exactly, but the most important thing to me is to always... always...

IRENE

Always what!

SUZY

Protect the children.

IRENE

No. That's not it.

SUZY

It's not? Really? How can that not be the most--

IRENE

All right it is. Basically it is. But how can you do that, how can you protect the children if you're not in control. The most important "thing" is to always be in control.

SUZY

Of what?

IRENE

Of everything. But mostly yourself. Always be in control of yourself!!

SUZY

Like you are now?

IRENE

Excuse me?

SUZY

I'm sorry. I just meant--

IRENE

(deep breath)
You were out of control.

SUZY

No I wasn't.

IRENE

Yes. You were.

SUZY

No. I was trying to protect Florence. And he was--

IRENE

You injured him.

SUZY

He was hurting her.

IRENE

You could have prevented that and still stayed in control.

SUZY

Okay but he's big, right. Malcolm's a big kid.

IRENE

So?

SUZY

So I had to--

IRENE

Grab him and push him to the ground.

SUZY

He lost his balance.

IRENE

Because you pushed him. Because you were out of control. And now all hell is going to break loose around here. Do you know what I'm talking about when I say that?

SUZY

Yes. No. Sort of.

IRENE

You know he's on the spectrum, right.

SUZY

Well when you say the spectrum...

IRENE

I mean the spectrum. You're not familiar with the term?

SUZY

Of course I am. I just hope you're weren't suggesting he's full on autistic. Because he's not.

IRENE

Did I say he was? I said he was on the spectrum. Do you agree with that? Is he somewhere on the goddamn spectrum or not?

SUZY

Yes. He is.

IRENE

Okay then. So that's a complicating factor. And they haven't had him diagnosed yet for some reason. I mean the kids's 12 years old for godsake so why the hell not?

SUZY

I don't know.

IRENE

Of course you don't. How could you. But he's definitely on it, right. I mean he's...

SUZY

Yeah he's--

IRENE

Different. He's different than the other kids

SUZY

You mean the other boys.

IRENE

Yeah I guess I do. I mean I tried to bring it up when he first transferred in, but--

SUZY

Actually I don't think he's *that* different. I mean other boys in the class are--

IRENE

Disruptive?

SUZY

Yeah. Absolutely.

IRENE

But he's worse. Because he's on the spectrum.

SUZY

I dunno. Maybe they all are.

IRENE

Jesus. Don't ever say that. You mean that?

SUZY

Well if being on the spectrum means they're pretty much always causing some kind of disruption or being incredibly rude then--

IRENE

It's more than that. You must have noticed. Anyway don't ever say that to anyone else okay. I mean hearing that you think all the boys in your class are autistic might be seriously detrimental.

SUZY

To the boys?

IRENE

To your career. And mine I mean I hired you for godsake. Anyway we have to be prepared for the consequences of what you did. His mother's on the way in.

SUZY

She is?

IRENE

Yeah. Have you met her?

SUZY

No.

IRENE

Well she's... Yeah she's... The thing is, we should be prepared for it to get ugly.

SUZY

Really? Do I have to be here?

IRENE

Of course you have to be here. It's you she wants to confront.

SUZY

I don't think I'm up to being confronted. Look I really don't want to be here.

IRENE

You think I do? It's just an unfortunate part of the job and we--

SUZY

No I mean in this school. I don't actually want to be in this school. I'd pretty much decided that grade five was my tops. You know when they're still actually...kids. Still open to *being* kids. But you kept hiring me to sub and then this full time thing came up, and I guess no one better, I mean no one with half a brain, wanted to take it on so-- And this isn't even one of the worst right. Not really. I mean there are way worse schools that I had placements in. And when I told my dad, he's a cop right, and when I told him I was taking a job teaching grade seven, he said I might as well join the force. Well first he said, "Are you fucking nuts"...

(MORE)

SUZY (CONT'D)

He's seen lots of twelve year olds in juvenile court, right. So he said I should just join the force and help put them away until they've been taught about the consequences of their actions and become human enough to be in any classroom situation. But I thought that was way too harsh. So I took your job offer. And I've been trying my best but feeling like a failure almost right from the start. And now...well yeah I guess I am really out of control.

IRENE

Don't be silly. You're doing fine. I was just trying to make a point.

SUZY

You were?

IRENE

I might have gone too far.

SUZY

(wobbling a bit)

I think I'm gonna be sick.

She rushes out.

IRENE

Sorry!

Irene's cell rings.

IRENE (CONT'D)

(into phone)

Hi ... Yeah. I did ... Not too well. She's in the bathroom vomiting... Well apparently she has issues... The same ones it took most of us twenty years to develop. She's both terrified and fed up ... Yeah I hired her but you okayed it... Well when you didn't get back to me, I assumed you were okaying it ... My point is we're both ... I'm not panicking. I'm preparing ... No not to pass the buck. I'm just, well if it's like last time it's going to reverberate... It means it'll be on the news, what do you think it means ... No that's your job. You're the district supervisor, so if you want news cameras kept off the school grounds you can get over here and--

Maggie, 37, comes in. She has a shoulder bag on and she is carrying her car keys.

MAGGIE

Where is she?

IRENE

Hi. I wasn't expecting you so soon.

MAGGIE

Why not?

IRENE

Well you said you had a meeting and-

MAGGIE

I cancelled it. I was supposed to meet a client in court, but I wasn't in any mood to be nice to him. Where's the girl?

IRENE

In the washroom. She's quite upset.

MAGGIE

Yeah? So you canned her then.

IRENE

No she-- It's a bit premature to be talking about her dismissal.

MAGGIE

Why?

IRENE

Well there are--

MAGGIE

You mean you have to get the union on side. How long will that take?

IRENE

If it comes to that, there's a very clearly outlined process and we'll have to--

MAGGIE

Can you suspend her in the meantime?

IRENE

Even that decision will involve an investigation.

MAGGIE

An investigation. Right. You mean by the police?

IRENE

No I meant an internal--

MAGGIE

Because I'm fine with that. I was hoping we could handle this quietly for your sake, but I'm fine with calling in the police.

IRENE

No. I think we can handle this without--

MAGGIE

She assaulted my son.

IRENE

Well that has yet to be determined. And we should probably begin with--

MAGGIE

There were witnesses. I talked to the parents of two of his classmates who saw what happened.

IRENE

All of it?

MAGGIE

Excuse me?

IRENE

Well did they see what Malcolm was doing before Ms Nevins was forced to intervene.

MAGGIE

Intervene? He was having an argument with that girl. You know, the loud one. He was trying to explain something to her and she, as usual, wouldn't let him get a word in.

IRENE

Well that might be part of it.

MAGGIE

Yes. The most important part. You know we chose this school because it has a half decent reputation, but it's starting to look like a very big mistake.

IRENE

Well I think you should reserve judgement on that until we've reviewed all the facts.

(MORE)

IRENE (CONT'D)

Which reminds me, I still haven't received Malcolm's records from his previous school.

MAGGIE

They sent them to me.

IRENE

Why would they do that?

MAGGIE

Because I told them we weren't sure about keeping him here. I tend to think ahead about these things.

Suzy comes back in. She and Maggie just look at each other.

IRENE

(to Suzy)

Better?

SUZY

Yes. Thanks.

(off Maggie's glare.)

Look... Ms Alexander, I ah...

MAGGIE

Save your breath. There's no way an apology of any kind is going to make this just disappear.

SUZY

Okay, but--

MAGGIE

Good. As long as you both understand that.

(to Irene)

Because what she did to my boy is--

SUZY

But I wasn't going to apologize.

MAGGIE

I'm sorry?

SUZY

I wasn't going to apologize. I was going to explain why I felt it necessary to do what I did.

MAGGIE

Really.

SUZY

Yeah. You can't think I just decided to...grab your son for no reason. That would be stupid.

MAGGIE

You mean you'd have been stupid to do it, or I'd be stupid to think it.

SUZY

Both.

IRENE

I think maybe this would be a good time for--

MAGGIE

For what? Refreshments?

IRENE

No for us all to just take a breath and-- Unless you feel like something. A coffee maybe?

MAGGIE

(to Suzy)

How old are you?

SUZY

Twenty-four.

MAGGIE

And this is your first teaching job.

SUZY

First permanent one, yes. I was subbing for a year.

MAGGIE

Without incident?

SUZY

I'm sorry?

MAGGIE

Did you attack any other children during that time?

SUZY

Come on. Gimme a break.

IRENE

(to Maggie)

Yeah. You know what, I think you need to dial it back a bit.

MAGGIE

Meaning what exactly?

SUZY

Meaning you can keep talking to me like that, or we can actually try to get to the bottom of this.

MAGGIE

Sure. Except like I said, there's nothing you can tell me that will excuse--

IRENE

He was intimidating another student.

MAGGIE

Intimidating?

SUZY

He was behaving in a very threatening manner to one of his classmates.

MAGGIE

You're talking about the girl with all the opinions. The bossy one who--

SUZY

Her name is Florence and he was--

MAGGIE

Standing his ground.

SUZY

What? No. He was--

MAGGIE

It was an argument and because Florence never leaves anyone room to express their opinion he--

SUZY

He got very very close to her.

MAGGIE

So what?

SUZY

Well he's much bigger than she is.

MAGGIE

So this is about his size. You think they were about to have a fist fight and she would have been overmatched.

SUZY

She was frightened.

MAGGIE

Of what? That someone else was actually going to win an argument with her.

SUZY

He said he felt like smashing her in the mouth.

MAGGIE

I don't believe that.

SUZY

I heard him.

MAGGIE

I think you're lying.

IRENE

Okay. That's enough.

MAGGIE

Enough of what?

SUZY

Enough of you.

IRENE

(to Maggie)

She means if you're not willing to listen to what happened then --

Irene's cell goes off.

IRENE (CONT'D)

Excuse me.

(answers)

Hi... Yeah I'll be there in a minute.

(to Maggie)

I'm needed in the office.

MAGGIE

Something more important come up?

IRENE

I won't be long. Maybe you two should take a break until I get back.

MAGGIE

Why? Do you think you've been an essential part of the discussion up until now?

SUZY

(to Irene)

I'll be fine.

Irene nods and leaves.

MAGGIE

"I'll be fine." Why'd you say that?
Do you think she's worried about
your safety?

SUZY

Why would she be worried about my
safety?

MAGGIE

Well maybe she believes it's a
parenting issue. That the
belligerence you've decided my son
possesses comes from my husband and
me. That we're as dangerous as he
is. Is that what she thinks?

SUZY

I doubt that's the conclusion she's
come to. I mean if she's come to
any conclusion at all.

MAGGIE

(quickly)
What are you going to do?
(off her look)
I mean about a job.
(off another look)
Surely it's crossed your mind that
you're going to have to find a
another profession.

SUZY

What are you going to do about your
son.

MAGGIE

Careful now. That's a very
inappropriate question. I know
you're relatively inexperienced but
even so--

SUZY

You're right. I should have said
for your son.

MAGGIE

Still over the line, dear.

Suzy retrieves a file folder from her desk.

SUZY

Irene says you haven't had him
diagnosed.

MAGGIE

She does, does she? Well Irene's job might be in jeopardy as well.

SUZY

Is that why you came here? To threaten us?

MAGGIE

It wasn't a threat. Do you think you're both immune to the consequences of what was done.

SUZY

Why don't you want to talk about your son's behaviour?

MAGGIE

Well I'd definitely want to do that if he's the one who'd caused somebody physical harm. But he isn't, is he?

SUZY

Because I stopped him.

MAGGIE

You're sure of that. There's no reasonable doubt in your mind about that.

SUZY

No there isn't. Why do you find that hard to believe? You must know that he has a pretty bad temper.

MAGGIE

He gets frustrated. That must be what you're talking about.

SUZY

Sure. Call it frustration. Call it a temper. Call it a developmental disorder.

MAGGIE

Hey--

SUZY

But recognize that he has a problem and get him help.

She hands Maggie the file folder.

MAGGIE

What's this?

SUZY

His file.

MAGGIE

You keep a file on him?

SUZY

These are the messages he leaves for me.

MAGGIE

Leaves for you where?

SUZY

On my desk. Under my door.

MAGGIE

Your classroom door?

SUZY

Yes.

MAGGIE

Well that's okay. I was worried you were going to tell me he knows where you live.

SUZY

Why would you be worried about that?

MAGGIE

Did I say worried? I meant it would have been of some concern but not-- What kind of messages?

SUZY

All kinds.

MAGGIE

Meaning?

SUZY

Well some are nice. Friendly. Wishing me a good evening. Some are not so nice. Complaining that he couldn't understand something in class and blaming me for it. And then there are the others.

MAGGIE

What "others"?

SUZY

The nasty ones, and the inappropriate ones.

MAGGIE
Inappropriate in what ways?

SUZY
In inappropriate ways.

MAGGIE
And are there a lot of those?

SUZY
Yes.

MAGGIE
And you keep them all in a file.

SUZY
Yes.

MAGGIE
Why?

SUZY
I was planning to talk to someone
about them.

MAGGIE
Talk to *me* about them.

SUZY
I was actually thinking that a
child psychologist might be--
(off her look)
Okay. Right. Maybe you should read
them first.

Irene enters with a can of ginger ale.

IRENE
Excuse me.
(to Suzy)
Mr. Tavana would like to see you in
my office.

MAGGIE
Who's he?

IRENE
The District Supervisor.
(to Suzy)
He's just parking his car now,
so...

SUZY
Sure.

Suzy leaves.

Irene smiles pleasantly at Maggie.

IRENE
Will you be okay?

MAGGIE
What are you talking about?

IRENE
Are you still sure you don't want a
refreshment of some kind? A soft
drink maybe?

MAGGIE
You know, I get the impression you
don't appreciate the gravity of
this situation.

IRENE
And why is that?

MAGGIE
Your obsession with different kinds
of beverages, for one thing. Plus
your clearly insincere cheerful
manner.

IRENE
I'll be back in a few minutes.

She starts off. Stops. Watches as Maggie starts to look through the papers in the file. They are mostly pages torn from a notepad. She is getting upset.

IRENE (CONT'D)
He sent her emails too. A fair
amount of them actually.

MAGGIE
That's impossible.

IRENE
Why?

MAGGIE
He has no computer skills. Surely
someone's noticed that.

Irene smiles. Puts a can of ginger ale on the desk near Maggie.

IRENE
In case you change your mind.

Irene leaves.

Maggie continues reading, grabs the drink absent-mindedly, pops the cap and takes a huge swallow.

MAGGIE
(to herself)
What the fuck...

Jack enters the room. He is a little older than Maggie. He is wearing shorts and a t-shirt and an old Tilley hat. And he has a smudge of dirt on his forehead.

JACK
Hey...

Maggie looks up at him in disbelief.

MAGGIE
Why are you dressed like that?

JACK
I was working in the garden. I'm worried about the broccoli.

MAGGIE
What?

JACK
The broccoli.

MAGGIE
Broccoli's tricky. We might have to write it off. Concentrate on the root vegetables.

JACK
They'll be fine.

MAGGIE
Unless they get infested.

JACK
With what.

MAGGIE
Anything. If we want to get through the winter we'll need the carrots and potatoes.

JACK
I don't want to give up on the broccoli.

MAGGIE
Okay but don't lose your focus. It's all about survival, right. Does Malcolm have access to a computer when you take him to work?

JACK
There's one in the warehouse he sometimes plays around with.

MAGGIE

And do you ever look to see what he's doing when he's...playing around?

JACK

No. Why? Are you worried he's looking at porn?

MAGGIE

No. I'd actually be a little encouraged by that. I mean not that it's the best way to learn, but at least he'd be showing normal curiosity.

JACK

Yeah well...normal. What's that mean with his history?

MAGGIE

They say he's been emailing the teacher.

JACK

Really? That's probably not good.

MAGGIE

No. It's probably not, Jack. Why didn't you change? Maybe even take a shower.

JACK

I can't get used to cold water showers.

MAGGIE

Please grow up about that. We need for you to fully adjust to our circumstances. We're going to have to interact with these people from time to time.

JACK

Okay yeah. But maybe now I have this job--

MAGGIE

This *part-time* job.

JACK

Yeah but even with that, maybe we can get the electricity back on. And then we'd have hot--

MAGGIE

Is electricity more important than food or Malcolm's supplements?

JACK

No.

MAGGIE

So?

JACK

Do you want me to go back and clean up?

MAGGIE

It's too late. Jesus, Jack. It's important that these people take us seriously. Look how I'm dressed.

JACK

Yeah. You look nice.

MAGGIE

Yes. I do. And they still can't stop themselves from humouring me.

JACK

And you went to all that trouble. You might as well have just put on your jeans like usual.

MAGGIE

I couldn't. I was coming from work.

JACK

What are you talking about?

MAGGIE

That's what I told them. These people don't respect stay at home mothers nearly as much as they do lawyers.

JACK

You told them you were a lawyer?

MAGGIE

I tried to give them that impression.

JACK

Jesus. What did you tell them I did?

MAGGIE

It never came up. But now that you've shown up looking like that I'll have to come up with something suitable.

(off his clothes)

Like a grave digger.

JACK
What's wrong with the truth?

MAGGIE
You think they'll believe I'm
married to a night watchman. I'm a
goddamn lawyer!
(shows him the keys)
Look I even have a car.

JACK
Where'd you get those.

MAGGIE
Found them on the street a few
years ago. Thought they might come
in useful. They're from an Audi.
Would an Audi driver be married to
a night watchman?

JACK
No way.

MAGGIE
I'll tell them you're a writer.

JACK
I *am* a writer.

MAGGIE
I'll tell them you're a *published*
writer.

JACK
Okay. But don't say it like that.
Nobody introduces a writer as a
published writer. It sounds fake.
You can say I'm a widely produced
playwright.

MAGGIE
So you want me to go from fake to
ridiculous.

JACK
Right. Just say I'm self employed.

MAGGIE
As what?

JACK
Doesn't matter. No one ever asks
that. I say it all the time.
What's wrong with your eyes?

MAGGIE
Nothing.

JACK
Looks like you've got an allergy or something.

MAGGIE
I don't.

JACK
Well what is it then?

MAGGIE
It's nothing for godsake!

JACK
(looking closer)
Jesus. You've been crying.

MAGGIE
Okay let's not get all--

JACK
Wow. After all we've been through and how strong you've been, like almost not-quite-human strong... you've let his teacher make you cry?

MAGGIE
No. It wasn't her. Here.

She hands him the file.

JACK
What's this?

MAGGIE
All the things our son wrote to the teacher

JACK
You mean besides the emails?

MAGGIE
Yeah apparently he's got a lot to say to her. You should read them. But sit down before you start.

JACK
Why?

MAGGIE
In case you faint.

JACK
What are you talking about? I don't faint.

MAGGIE

You fainted the first time I told you I wanted a divorce.

JACK

I thought you were serious.

MAGGIE

I was. Anyway this is a lot worse.

He sits at one of the student's desks, starts to read.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

Is Malcolm outside?

JACK

No.

MAGGIE

You left him at home alone? Have you gone nuts?

JACK

He never came home. I thought he was with you.

MAGGIE

You thought I'd bring him to school when I was planning to talk to the authorities.

JACK

Don't call them the authorities. We're not in Occupied France. They're just--

MAGGIE

They're the people in charge. The people we have to impress.

JACK

(off one of the messages)
Jesus... What's wrong with this kid.

MAGGIE

Excuse me?

JACK

Sorry. But some of these are--

Irene comes in.

IRENE

(to Jack)
Oh. Hi.

MAGGIE

This is my husband Jack.

IRENE

Really? No. Good. It's good that you're here because--

MAGGIE

He can't stay.

IRENE

Oh. Well that's unfortunate because The District Super--

MAGGIE

Our son is missing.

IRENE

I'm sorry? What do you mean missing?

MAGGIE

I mean we don't know exactly where he is.

JACK

He's probably at his friend's house.

MAGGIE

But we're not exactly sure of that so--

IRENE

Can't you call?

MAGGIE

He doesn't have a phone.

IRENE

I meant his friend. Can you call his friend's house?

(to Jack)

Do you have the number?

JACK

What number?

MAGGIE

His friend's number?

JACK

Ah...no.

IRENE

If he's a friend from school, I could get it for you.

JACK
Which school? Oh you mean this one.

JACK/MAGGIE
No.

MAGGIE
He's not.
(to Jack)
Just go.

JACK
Go where?

MAGGIE
To find our son!

JACK
Oh. Right.
(to Irene)
Good to meet you.

He leaves.

MAGGIE
(smiles)
Men, eh.
(shrugs)
So...where were we?

IRENE
Where were we. Good question.

MAGGIE
I think you were going to tell me
that the Supervisor wants to see
me.

IRENE
Oh well that might not be--

Suzy comes in.

SUZY
Who was that?

MAGGIE
My husband. I asked him to come
here.

SUZY
Oh.
(to Irene)
He's leaving.

MAGGIE
He's gone to look for Malcolm.

SUZY

Who?

MAGGIE

My husband. Is someone else leaving?

SUZY

Yes. Mr. Tavana. The District--

IRENE

(to Maggie)

Supervisor. That's what I came to tell you. He had to get to another meeting, and he suggested we pretty upsetreschedule--

MAGGIE

Fuck that. I'm a busy woman!

She rushes out. Irene peers out the door and down the hall

SUZY

Where is she going?

IRENE

I think she's trying to catch up to him.

(back towards Suzy)

There's something wrong with that woman.

SUZY

Tell me about it.

Suzy has gone to her desk.

IRENE

How'd it go with Tavana after I left?

SUZY

It got worse.

Starts to mark the assignments. She is pretty upset.

IRENE

Why? What did you say?

SUZY

It's not what *I* said.

IRENE

Suzy. Don't mess with me. I'm not in the mood.

SUZY

He asked me a question I didn't like.

IRENE

Which was?

SUZY

About the status of my personal life.

IRENE

And?

SUZY

And I told him it was none of his business.

IRENE

So it *is* what you said. Why didn't you just tell him you're single?

SUZY

Because I think what he was really asking is if I'm getting enough.

IRENE

Jesus, Suzy.

SUZY

No I think he'd be going in that direction for awhile.

IRENE

Not while I was there.

SUZY

After you left. For example, he asked me if I was content.

IRENE

With what?

SUZY

Just content. Don't you think that's weird.

IRENE

Not if he was referring to your job.

SUZY

I'd already made it clear that I love my job.

IRENE

You do?

SUZY

No. Yes. Well up until today at least kind of. But that's not what he meant. I think he was asking me something pretty creepy. Like if I might be I'm too horny and frustrated to be a teacher. "Are you content. Are you at a happy place in your life?" What the fuck!

IRENE

Please. How many times have I asked you not to swear while you're in the school.

SUZY

You swear.

IRENE

No I don't. Sure, in the staff room. But that's different. It's those phys ed teachers. I mean how many friggin' soccer balls do they need anyway. I told them, "you're asking for forty more soccer balls when most of the lower grade teachers in this city are buying their own art supplies?"so... Look Tavana's kind of socially awkward.

SUZY

So what?

IRENE

So he probably wasn't asking about your sex life. And I didn't tell him about your condition.

SUZY

What condition?

IRENE

Do you really want to go there?

SUZY

Go where?

IRENE

Well you're clearly bipolar.

SUZY

No I'm not.

IRENE

It's okay. We can't discriminate against people with mental--

SUZY

What are you talking about?
Is this because I cried. I was
nervous.

IRENE

Are you always nervous? Because I
get reports from other people.

SUZY

What other people? Other teachers?

IRENE

What's it matter. All I'm saying is
how you were behaving at that
meeting and how you behave in
general sometimes...well it kinda
says you're bipolar.

SUZY

Except that I'm not.

IRENE

Then what are you?

SUZY

I'm a little moody!

IRENE

Moody.

SUZY

Yeah. I get moody when I'm scared.
And I'm scared a lot because I felt
right from the start that I was
being watched. And that I was
probably being judged...and that I
wasn't really up to the job.

IRENE

And that's it?

SUZY

Yeah.

IRENE

Oh, okay. That's normal. That's not
bipolar at all. No one ever feels
up to the job. Failure hovers over
us like a bad smell. I must have
told you that when I hired you.

SUZY

No. You didn't.

IRENE

Oh. I guess I was feeling strangely
optimistic that day.

(MORE)

IRENE (CONT'D)

You probably made me feel like you were an exception. That you had an inner resolve.

SUZY

I don't. I mean I do. But today has been... I mean I might lose my job, right.

IRENE

We both might.

SUZY

Why would they fire you over something *I* did?

IRENE

Oh they won't *fire* me, but there are worse things they can do to a principal who adds the "wrong people" to her staff. And that can't happen to me. I can't do that. I just can't do it.

SUZY

What?

IRENE

Teach. No no. That line was crossed. If I have to go stand in front of a room full of semi-literate-- No no. I can't go back.
(a bit of a sway)
I feel a little dizzy.

SUZY

What's wrong?

IRENE

The memory. The hideous memory of my last teaching day. Either that or it's an aneurysm. No its the memory...

(sitting)

I was teaching high school history. It was at the end of a term on World War Two. I'd just finished a summary of the entire conflict. And I asked if anyone had a question. Never do that by the way. One of the girls who lived in the "pretty bubble" raised her hand and asked me... she asked... "Ahhh who won that war?"

SUZY

Jesus...

IRENE

And it wasn't a joke. I know this because none of the other students laughed. And a fair number of them seemed to be nodding their heads, as if they would also like an answer to that question. So I stood there wondering if it was in any way possible, that after devoting several arduous weeks to the subject, I had somehow failed to mention who the victorious side was. It was just a fleeting thought. But it was enough to know I'd crossed over. Crossed over from teacher to frightened observer. I mean who were these people. Because if that's what they can do to you, if they can even for an instant, make you think that you taught a full term on World War Two and never got around to mentioning who won the friggin' thing, then they have way too much influence and power over your general well being. Super human power.

(whispering)

Power that might have been given them by someone on their home planet.

(looks at Suzy hard)

So you have to get through this incident untarnished! And so do I!

SUZY

How?

IRENE

We take off the gloves.

Maggie comes back in. Dishevelled, sweating and a little out of breath. Her jacket is a bit torn and her knee is bloody.

MAGGIE

He made me chase him! I'm sure he saw me running behind his car, but he wouldn't stop. Not even after I fell... I lost him when the traffic thinned out, and he just took off. He's your Supervisor? What a total asshole.

IRENE

He's very busy.

MAGGIE

Aren't they all. All total assholes are always "very busy." Yeah.

(MORE)

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

Too busy to be decent human beings.
I'll take that drink now.

IRENE

Sure. You mean another one.

MAGGIE

What?

IRENE

You already drank the first one.

MAGGIE

So ther's a limit.

IRENE

No. Of course not. I'll just go
and...

She throws Suzy a look on her way out. Suzy hands Maggie a kleenex which Maggie uses to dab her knee.

SUZY

(gestures to files)
Did you read those?

MAGGIE

Yes.

SUZY

Do you want to talk about them?

MAGGIE

Not really. But I suppose you do.

SUZY

Are you telling me you didn't find
them a little troubling?

MAGGIE

He's got a crush on you.

SUZY

And that's it? That's all you think
they're about.

MAGGIE

He sometimes has a problem
expressing himself.

SUZY

A lot of the things he wrote seem
pretty expressive to me.

MAGGIE

I mean properly. I mean in the
usual way. The way you might think
was proper.

SUZY

Just me?

MAGGIE

And people like you who just don't understand...who have a narrow view of what's proper or expected and know nothing about what circumstances might be behind a child's inability to--

SUZY

How about this?

(reading from one)

"Sometimes I wanna throw you out the window"

(shrugs)

What part of that is something I'm not understanding.

MAGGIE

Well maybe you upset him on that particular day. Maybe you didn't answer a question he had, or maybe you picked on him in some way.

SUZY

I never "pick on" my students.

MAGGIE

Yeah you just beat the crap outta them.

SUZY

You think that helps? Saying things like that? You know what, this isn't helping *anyone*.

Suzy starts out.

MAGGIE

All right. Okay...

Suzy stops.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

You didn't actually beat him up. I'm willing to admit that. And if you say you never pick on him then okay. But...well that might be the way he saw it even if you didn't actually intend to--

SUZY

What are you talking about?

MAGGIE

Well I told you he has problems
expressing himself in a way that--

SUZY

Someone like me wouldn't think was
proper.

MAGGIE

Right. But--

SUZY

So if I were to show these to
someone with a not so narrow
understanding of what's proper-

MAGGIE

I think you're just trying to get
me off the real issue here. And I'm
not going to let you do that.

SUZY

Oh come on. You read those things
and you *really* don't think--

MAGGIE

I said I'm not going to let you do
this!

Irene comes back in with a Coke.

IRENE

Now what's going on?

MAGGIE

She's trying to wriggle out of her
responsibility for the--

SUZY

She read the notes Malcolm sent me.
And she doesn't think it's a big
deal.

IRENE

(to Maggie)
Are you kidding?

MAGGIE

(to Suzy)
You showed them to *her*. I think
that's a breach of confidentiality.

IRENE

What the hell are you talking
about? I'm her principal.

MAGGIE

You can't address me like that.
There are consequences for
addressing a parent like that.

IRENE

And there are consequences for
sending a teacher threatening
notes. I wanted to go to the
police, but she talked me out of
it.

MAGGIE

To the police? Talk about an over
reaction.

SUZY

She thinks he just has a crush on
me.

IRENE

Really.

(to Maggie)

And that makes him want to throw
her out the window or...

(to Suzy)

...what's that other one?

SUZY

Sew my mouth shut.

IRENE

Right. Some crush.

MAGGIE

He's just--

SUZY

She thinks he just has a problem
expressing himself in the right
way.

IRENE

He has a problem all right. But it
goes way beyond that.

MAGGIE

Well even if he does, even if he
does have a "problem" of some kind,
for some very complex reasons, does
it give her any right to hit him!

SUZY

I didn't hit him! I thought you
were going to stop saying things
like that.

MAGGIE

I didn't say you beat him. I said you hit him.

SUZY

I didn't do either one for chrissake.

IRENE

Suzy.

MAGGIE

(to Suzy)

Okay! You grabbed him! You pushed him to the ground.

SUZY

He fucking fell!

IRENE

Suzy!

SUZY

Well he did! He fell!

MAGGIE

Because you grabbed him!

SUZY

He was about to attack that girl!

MAGGIE

He was humiliated!

SUZY

She was terrified!

Jack comes in. But slowly.

JACK

Hi. I just...

MAGGIE

Did you find him?

JACK

Not yet. This is just an update. I'm still working on it.

MAGGIE

Really. And how can you do that from here.

JACK

Right.

He starts off. Stops

JACK (CONT'D)
(to Maggie)
That jacket's ripped.

MAGGIE
I fell.

JACK
Oh. Well how can you take it back
to the store like that?

MAGGIE
(covering)
Why would I have to take it back to
the store?

JACK
Oh. Yeah. Right.
(to Others)
She wouldn't.

He leaves.

Irene offers Maggie the Coke.

MAGGIE
I don't drink that shit.

IRENE
You drank the ginger ale.

MAGGIE
Yeah, so what. Read the label.
"Contains real ginger." Get the
difference? You think that thing
contains real coke? It'd be better
if it did. What it contains is just
about everything in the world which
kills you. Even in the worst of
times I never touched it.

Suzy and Irene share a look.

SUZY
What's that mean? The worst of
times.

MAGGIE
It's just an expression.

SUZY
It is?

MAGGIE
Yeah. Like if someone asks how it's
going you say something like "it
could be worse."

SUZY

Could it?

MAGGIE

What?

IRENE

Is there something, anything you'd like to share with us.

MAGGIE

No...

IRENE

I mean not just about Malcolm. Because if there's a problem of any kind...

SUZY

We're here to help.

(to Irene)

Right?

IRENE

Yes. Because what...affects the parent almost always affects the child.

MAGGIE

What's going on here?

IRENE

Excuse me?

MAGGIE

What the hell is going on here? Has this got anything at all to do with what happened my son?

IRENE

Well maybe not...

SUZY

Or maybe yes. Because like we said if there's a problem at home...

MAGGIE

Isn't there always a problem of some kind at home? Anyone's home. Don't most people, most families go through a number of ups and downs in their lives? Don't most parents have problems at work, or finding work, or losing work and having to find other work. Or losing their car, and then their house.

(MORE)

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

And then their smaller house and then having no house at all for quite sometime, just a very small apartment and then losing that as well and having to spend a certain amount of time in a shelter, or on the street, or in a park or under a bridge ...

SUZY

That was your family?

MAGGIE

What?

IRENE

Did that happen to you?

MAGGIE

What? No. A client of mine. That was what she told me when she was ...trying to convince me to work pro bono... I don't feel very well. I think I must have forgotten to... eat lunch.

She passes out.

SUZY

Oh Jesus. What's happening?

Irene is kneeling over Maggie.

IRENE

She's just fainted. Get her some water.

SUZY

From where?

IRENE

A tap.

SUZY

What tap?

IRENE

A tap in the bathroom.

SUZY

You mean one of the ones that the yellow water comes out of?

IRENE

Hey. It's not--

SUZY

Yes it is. It's yellow. I don't let my students drink it, so I don't think we should be giving to her.

IRENE

I was just going to splash her face with it.

SUZY

Yeah but even so--

IRENE

Jesus. Okay. There's bottled water in my office.

SUZY

What? You have your own water supply?

IRENE

I keep a case for emergencies.

SUZY

Emergencies.

IRENE

Yeah. Like this. Just go get it, okay. It's in the corner under a gym mat.

SUZY

You mean it's hidden.

IRENE

Just go get it!

SUZY

Sure.

She starts out.

SUZY (CONT'D)

(to herself)

Under a gym mat...

Irene is gently hitting Maggie's face.

IRENE

Hey...hey, wake up. Hey!

(to herself)

Jesus Christ... Something else I'm gonna have to take the blame for.

(tries to listen to her heart)

Jesus...is she even alive.

(opens her jacket)

Okay...okay...

(MORE)

IRENE (CONT'D)
 (starts to do CPR pumps)
 Okay...
 (notices a tag inside the
 jacket)
 What the...

Suzy rushes in with a large case of bottled water.

SUZY
 What are you doing? You said she'd
 just fainted.

IRENE
 Yeah well I might have been wrong
 about that.

SUZY
 Holy fuck!

IRENE
 For fuck sake! Do not swear!! How
 many times have I fucking told you
 not to swear in this goddamn
 building?!

Maggie coughs.

SUZY
 Hey. I think she's--

IRENE
 (stops pumping)
 Yeah. I think she's-- Who told you
 to bring the whole case?

Maggie starts to stir.

IRENE (CONT'D)
 Look, I think she's okay.

SUZY
 So about this water...it's really
 just for your personal use, right.
 You tell everyone else that the tap
 water is fine, but you keep your
 own supply.

IRENE
 Do you really think this is the
 right time to get into all that?

SUZY
 I'm just a little disappointed in
 you, that's all.

IRENE
 (standing)
 Are you? Are you really?
 (MORE)

IRENE (CONT'D)

You're on the carpet for physically accosting a student, but you're disappointed in me. Please.

SUZY

(off a tag on Maggie's jacket)
What's that?

IRENE

It's a sales tag.

They share a look.

SUZY

Do you think she left it on by mistake?

IRENE

Do *you*?

Maggie groans and opens her eyes.

MAGGIE

What's going on?

IRENE

You passed out.

They are helping her into a chair.

SUZY

From not eating.

MAGGIE

Who told you that?

IRENE/SUZY

You did.

SUZY

You didn't eat lunch.

MAGGIE

Don't be ridiculous.

SUZY

That's what you said.

MAGGIE

You must have misheard me.

IRENE/SUZY

Both of us?

MAGGIE

Yes! Of course I ate lunch! I had... sushi with my... colleagues.
(MORE)

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

At the firm's ...cafeteria...Yeah.
Must be that. The sushi. I mean it
happens right. It's raw fish for
god's sake. But I definitely ate
lunch, okay? Got that? I ate lunch!

IRENE

Sure. Got it. You ate lunch.

SUZY

So do you want to go to the
hospital?

MAGGIE

Why?

SUZY

You might have food poisoning.

MAGGIE

From what?

SUZY

From what you ate at lunch.

MAGGIE

Which was?

SUZY

Sushi! Jesus. What's wrong with
you? Why can't you just be straight
with us? That was *your* family you
were talking about, wasn't it? The
one that lost everything.

IRENE

Suzy.

SUZY

No this is nuts. There's a real
problem here.

IRENE

Maybe. But it's not really our --

SUZY

Our what? Our responsibility? Yes
it is. Of course it is! If she's
not eating or living in a good
situation then neither is her son
so--

MAGGIE

I think I've heard enough of this.
(getting up)
You'll be hearing from my lawyer.

IRENE

Oh. You mean one of your
colleagues.

MAGGIE

What?

IRENE

Well you're a lawyer, aren't you.
At least that's the impression
you've given us.

SUZY

So she probably just assumed you'd
be sicing one of your...colleagues
on us.

MAGGIE

I don't like your attitude.

IRENE/SUZY

We don't like yours.

SUZY

And do you know why? It's not
helpful. It doesn't help your son.
It just--

IRENE

Diverts blame.

MAGGIE

Excuse me?

IRENE

"Excuse me?" There you go again.
All this feigned indignation! I'm
sick of it!

MAGGIE

Feigned my ass, lady. You'll see
how feigned it is when we get you
all in court.

SUZY

So it's about money.

MAGGIE

I didn't say that.

SUZY

Well why else would we be in court?
Do you want us in jail?

MAGGIE

It's an option.

SUZY

Unless?

MAGGIE

I didn't bring up money. That was you.

SUZY

But it's also an option like you just said.

MAGGIE

I just meant everything is an option in a situation like this.

Jack comes in.

JACK

I found him.

SUZY

Is he all right.

JACK

I think so...

SUZY

What's that mean? You think so.

JACK

Well it's sometimes hard to tell.

MAGGIE

He means he's a preteen. Hormones and all the rest. Butt out, okay.

JACK

He wants to talk to you. He's in the bleachers.

IRENE

Our bleachers?

JACK

Yeah.

(to Maggie)

You better hurry. He told me he's not going to wait long.

Maggie stands, staggers a bit.

JACK (CONT'D)

What's wrong?

SUZY

She fainted.

JACK
(to Maggie)
I told you. You have to eat. What
good does it do us if you deprive
yourself--

MAGGIE
Shut up.

She leaves.

SUZY
So is he okay? Really.

JACK
I'm not sure.
(sits at a desk)
Probably not. Can I have one of
those bottles of water.

SUZY
Ask *her*. It's her private stock.

IRENE
Don't start.
(to Jack)
Sure.

She hands him a bottle.

SUZY
(to Jack)
We need to ask you something.

JACK
(finishes a long drink)
Sure. But not now, okay.

He leaves.

SUZY
There's something really wrong with
that family.

IRENE
Yeah...

SUZY
How long have you been using
bottled water anyway?

IRENE
Okay you're making too much of
this.

SUZY

When the water turned yellow two weeks ago did you run right out and stock up?

IRENE

I was just taking precautions. I can't be put out of action. This school would fall apart.

SUZY

What did the lab results show?

IRENE

They're not back yet. But I'm sure the water is fine.

SUZY

No you're not.

IRENE

I mean I'm reasonably sure. Look I didn't want to start a panic. What good would that do. A big part of my job is to reassure people.

SUZY

Even when there might actually be something wrong?

IRENE

There's always something wrong. There's always something broken, someone doing something stupid or half-assed or outright dangerous. And there's always someone finding out about it. Some parent, some trustee. Some student. For example, that girl Florence who you think Malcolm was going to hit, she's always on my case about something. The heat isn't turned up high enough. The gym is too dirty. Why not make lunch ten minutes longer? How about considering we quit early on Fridays? She's like a self appointed ombudsman or something.

SUZY

I think she's kind of great. Smart, totally alert. Yeah she has a lot to say, but if she were a boy that'd be thought of as a good thing. I like her a lot.

IRENE

And maybe that's why you were so fast to leap to her defense.

SUZY

Maybe it is.

IRENE

Anyway I get her upside too. I do. And I've got a lot worse to deal with. A half dozen of the "leaders" from parents' organization are on my back pretty much constantly. Right now they're very concerned about the assistant janitor.

SUZY

Spiro? Why?

IRENE

Because he doesn't speak English.

SUZY

So what?

IRENE

That's what I said. And you know what they said? "Well how can he bond with the students?" Bond with the students. He's a friggin' janitor. He's supposed to unclog the toilets and mop the hallways, and they want him to "bond" with the students. What does that even mean? Seriously. Do you have any idea what they're talking about?

SUZY

No.

IRENE

Okay. So there you go. That's my life.

(crying)

And you don't think I'm even allowed access to good water! What am I saying. I feel like a real shit about the water situation. Honestly. I think I need a sabbatical.

SUZY

Maybe you do.

IRENE

So I forgot to ask how it turned out with Tavana. Did he suspend you?

SUZY

He wants to hear from the parents first.

IRENE

Like hell he does. You heard what that loon said. He couldn't get away from her fast enough. No he wants us to deal with it. He wants us to either placate them or neutralize them. Because he definitely does not want to suspend you.

SUZY

Actually, he sounded like he did.

IRENE

Nah. He's full of it. He's scared shitless of the union. They all are. All the supervisors. All the trustees. They can't handle anymore labour disruptions. It's too "upsetting" for them.

SUZY

The union isn't going to do anything because of my suspension. That'd be crazy.

IRENE

Like that matters. They're just looking for an excuse to get you all to walk off the job. And most of the teachers want the same thing. To be honest, who can blame them? It can be a very ugly way to make a living. Look at you. You're almost a basket case. No offence. And in ten years if you last that long, you might be certifiable. And I'll tell you why.

SUZY

Please don't.

IRENE

Oh no, you need to hear this ... First of all, no one and I mean no one who hasn't done it, understands how hard it is. I bet your friends think it's a pretty cushy job, right. "You get all that time off." Yeah to recover, assholes. And not just from the abuse we face from just about everyone we have to deal with....

(MORE)

IRENE (CONT'D)

the kids who need the guidance or disciplining they should be getting from their parents, the parents themselves who think we're either overpaid baby sitters or incompetent idiots, the school trustees who know almost nothing about education and the politicians who know *absolutely* nothing about it. And then... there's the loss of faith. Faith that anything we do will make a difference. Faith in what the world out there really values, which has absolutely nothing to do what we try to instill in their children. Nothing! You hear me?! Nothing!! Not a fucking thing!!

SUZY

So that's just something you say.

IRENE

What is?

SUZY

That thing about not ever losing control.

IRENE

Oh, I'm way beyond losing control. Besides I only gave you that advice because I thought you were bipolar, and you might forget to take your meds one day.

Jack comes back in.

SUZY

Everything okay?

JACK

Well I think she's getting him there.

IRENE

Sorry. Getting him where?

JACK

Into a more reality-based state of mind. He was willing to hand over the knife.

Irene and Suzy look at each other.

JACK (CONT'D)

That's a punishment he was willing to accept.

IRENE
Handing over his knife?

SUZY
He usually has one in his
possession?

JACK
Maybe I shouldn't have mentioned
the knife.

SUZY
Maybe we should know more about
what's going on.

IRENE
She's right. And I'd definitely
like to start with the knife.

SUZY
And why he had it.

JACK
It's just a small knife.

IRENE
How small?

JACK
Small...
(he demonstrates about
five inches)
It's for protection.

IRENE
From?

JACK
Everyone. Especially today. He was
running away from home. And that
meant he'd need protection, right.
Because well...he just would.

SUZY
Why was he running away?

JACK
He got embarrassed.

IRENE
Embarrassed?

JACK
Deeply embarrassed. I was trying to
talk to him about those notes he
wrote...
(to Suzy)
...to you, right. They were to you.

SUZY

Yeah...

JACK

Yeah well I was trying to explain to him how...how inappropriate they were. But he wasn't seeming to get it. He thought they were funny.

IRENE

Funny?

JACK

Well if not funny then ... affectionate.

(to Suzy)

He likes you a lot. Anyway because he was having trouble understanding the problem with them I started to read a few of the notes to him and that's when he...took off.

IRENE

With the knife.

JACK

Or he might have gone back home after I left and got it. You know, I don't think we need to focus on the knife.

IRENE

You don't.

JACK

No. Like I said it was just for protection. You see. I think I did the wrong thing. I'd gone out looking for him expecting the worst.

IRENE

And what's that, the worst.

JACK

Could be a number of things. But he was more or less all right. Still kind of shaken from what went on today...

(to Suzy)

I mean with you. But I thought he was basically okay. So we walked home and when we got there I started in on the notes...and then well...

SUZY

But now he's with your wife. And he's better?

JACK

Yeah. Or he will be.

SUZY

That's good.

IRENE

Is it? I really don't think so. I think we need to get child services involved in this because there's a whole lot of what he's saying that is very troubling to me.

JACK

No no. I'm sure it's all going to be fine from here on in. He's calmed right down now.

(to Suzy)

We can forget about the incident today. Forget all about it.

(to Irene)

And there's really no need for child services. Honest.

They are just looking at him.

JACK (CONT'D)

Please. They'll take him away from us.

IRENE

Not necessarily. They just need to investigate and make sure he's--

JACK

No they'll take him away.

(off their looks)

This is hard, okay. Talking about this is hard. For a lot of reasons. Number one is that my wife might kill me. Or at the very least leave me...

(to himself)

Yeah but if those Child Services people get called, it's all over anyway so...

(looks at them)

He's not ours. Well he is now. For sure. In all the ways that matter he's our son. But not really, not in any legal...or biological way. We found him.

SUZY

You found him?

IRENE

Jesus...

JACK

Well we didn't just find him like you'd find something on the street. Well he was on the street. Well not exactly on the street. In a ravine. Well near a ravine. Under a bridge...

(looks at them)

With his grandfather. His dead grandfather. Yeah...

(exhales)

Malcolm had covered him with an old sleeping bag and he was just sitting there beside him, crying. It was quite touching.

(off their look)

And upsetting. It was also very upsetting obviously. So what to do, right? What do you do when you come across a situation like that?

IRENE

Most people would call the police.

JACK

Would they? Why? Oh you mean so they could launch an investigation and "ascertain" things. We decided to just talk to him.

SUZY

And he was okay with that? Two strangers just talking to him.

JACK

We weren't exactly strangers. He'd seen us around.

IRENE

Around where? The ravine? The bridge?

JACK

Yeah we were camped nearby.

IRENE

Camped?

SUZY

I think he means living.

(to Jack)

You were living there, right.

JACK

Yeah...

SUZY

(to Irene)

That story about her...client.

JACK

What story?

IRENE

So... instead of calling the police you talked to him.

JACK

Not *instead* of. We'd never call the police in a situation like that. They would have just put him in the system. Maggie grew up in the system. And she'd never voluntarily put a child in it. You don't want to hear what she went through. I mean it's a crap shoot, right. Some of them are good. But foster homes can be just a roll of the dice away from some very bad things. Besides he was good with us just taking over.

SUZY

Taking over from his grandfather.

JACK

Yeah. All we had to do was promise never to send him back to his parents.

IRENE

What was wrong with his parents?

JACK

What wasn't? Drugs, violence, sheer fucking stupidity. It was probably their stupidity as much as anything that made the grandfather take off with him. Whatever. He just wanted him to have a better life.

IRENE

Under a bridge.

JACK

Well at least he was loved there. Yeah you could tell that. Even from seeing them at a distance you could tell how much that old man loved him. So all we had to do really... was love him ourselves.

(MORE)

JACK (CONT'D)

You know, provide continuity in that way. I mean we didn't have much else to offer because well... everything had fallen apart for us. But we could love him. And care for him.

SUZY

And that was...?

JACK

Oh. Time wise? Five years ago. Malcolm was seven.

IRENE

And you've been living...outdoors all that time.

JACK

No. Well mostly. But a year ago we made a deal to take care of this abandoned house. And it's been better. That's made it a lot better.

IRENE

And what about his condition? You've just ignored that?

JACK

His condition?

IRENE

He's on the spectrum.

JACK

What spectrum?

IRENE

The autism spectrum.

JACK

No. Maggie says that's not right. She says that's what people might think, but it's not that.

SUZY

Then what is it?

JACK

Well he's damaged. Those first six or so years are proving hard for him to get over. But slowly--

SUZY

And what about his education? He doesn't seem to be behind in any of the core subjects.

JACK

Maggie's been teaching him. She's good at it. But we thought it was time to put him with other kids. Maybe that was a mistake.

SUZY

No. It was the right thing to do. There are some issues, but overall it was wise. It'll help him in the long run to be around kids his own age in a normal learning situation.

(to Irene)

I believe that. I mean knowing what we know now.

IRENE

Knowing what we know now might make that impossible. You think we can just proceed like everything is all right after hearing all that?

Maggie is in the room now.

MAGGIE

Hearing all what?

IRENE

(approaching)

Well let's start with the fact that you lied about Malcolm's school records.

MAGGIE

(to Jack)

Jesus! What have you done?

JACK

They were going to call Child Services. I think they got concerned about the knife.

MAGGIE

The paring knife? Why'd you tell them about that?

(to Irene and Suzy)

It's just...

(demonstrates)

...this big.

JACK

Yeah. Even smaller than I said.

MAGGIE

So why'd you tell them about it?!

JACK

I don't know. I'm not good with what to say and what to leave out. You know that.

MAGGIE

What else did you tell them?

JACK

Probably too much.

IRENE

We know that Malcolm isn't your child.

SUZY

She means legally.

JACK

Or biologically.

SUZY

(to Irene)

But they're obviously his parents in every other way.

IRENE

So you just want to go with that, do you? Look let me handle this okay.

SUZY

No. Not if that means breaking up their family. Do you really feel you need to let people know about this?

IRENE

Of course I do. They found him under a bridge with his dead grandfather. What the fuck...

MAGGIE

You told them that too?

JACK

I thought I should start at the beginning.

MAGGIE

He was born in a hospital. We took him home to our beautiful bungalow in the suburbs. What would have been wrong with that beginning. That *story*!?

JACK

Nothing until we got to the part where I lost my job and you had a breakdown... and we lost the house and everything else...

MAGGIE

You could have just left all that out.

SUZY

Except it wouldn't have told us what we should know about Malcolm.

MAGGIE

And what's that?

IRENE

Well a lot of kids have issues but--

MAGGIE

But his are bigger. Right. You think we don't know that? His are enormous.

Suzy's cell rings. It's in her desk. She goes for it.

JACK

She's right.

Suzy answers her cell.

SUZY

Hi... Okay, give me a second.
(to others)
Excuse me. I have to take this.

MAGGIE

Sure. Whatever. Life goes on, right.

Suzy leaves.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

She's probably making plans to go clubbing. Wouldn't want to get in the way of that.

IRENE

Look you're obviously very upset.

MAGGIE

Ya think?

IRENE

What I mean is we're not going to get very far with you having that attitude.

MAGGIE

Hey I earned this attitude.
(to Jack)
Didn't I?

JACK

She did.

MAGGIE

And there's no way we're stopping
now. We're only half way to the
truth, lady.

(to Jack)
Did you tell them about his
parents?

JACK

I gave them a general overview.

MAGGIE

Well that's no good.

(to Irene)
You have to hear the details. We've
dragged some of what Malcolm
remembers about being with them out
of him and...well you know what?
It's kind of a miracle he isn't
completely fucked.

JACK

She's right.

MAGGIE

I credit the grandfather for that.

JACK

Us too, Honey. You especially.

IRENE

(to Maggie)
So you're not a lawyer.

MAGGIE

Sure I am. I just like to spend my
summers outdoors with the homeless
and destitute. How dense are you
anyway?

JACK

No need for that, Maggie.

MAGGIE

You might change your mind after
you've spent a little more time
with her.

(to Irene)
The lawyer thing was just to put us
on an even playing field.

IRENE

Whatever you think that means.

MAGGIE

It means if I'd told you the truth about our living situation you wouldn't have given me the time of day.

IRENE

About what? The so-called assault? We apologized. We told you repeatedly we were looking into it. But what you wanted more. It seemed at one point like you were angling for money from us, and that's just weird.

MAGGIE

Weird. But not impossible. A few hundred dollars isn't that much to you two.

JACK

But it could really help us. We need to get the electricity back on.

MAGGIE

Yeah. He likes to have hot water to shower in.

(smiles at Jack)

It's one of your few weaknesses.

JACK

(smiles)

I love you, Sweetie.

MAGGIE

Right back at you.

(to Irene)

Where were we?

JACK

You were going to tell her some of the details about Malcolm's life with his...parents.

IRENE

Yeah but I don't think that's really necessary.

MAGGIE

Of course it is. You've put our lives in your hands with that threat to call child services, so I think you need to hear a lot more actually.

Suzy comes back in.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

And so do you. It might stop you from laying your hands on some other kid with "issues."

IRENE

(to Suzy)
Are you okay?

SUZY

I guess. That was Tavana.

IRENE

What did he want?

SUZY

I've been...terminated.

MAGGIE

Ah, so sad.

IRENE

Shut up ... I'm sorry. But just shut up okay

(to Suzy)
I don't think he's allowed to do that. Not without a hearing.

SUZY

He suggested it would be simpler if I quit.

IRENE

He was trying to bully you. I'm gonna call him.

Irene starts towards the door.

MAGGIE

No no. Stay put. First things first.

Maggie blocks her way.

MAGGIE

(takes a seven-inch knife out of her bag)
I need you to stay right where you are.

IRENE

Whoa. What's--

JACK

Hon.

MAGGIE

It's okay. Guard the door in case they try to escape.

(to Irene)

Sit down.

(to Suzy)

You too.

They both sit.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

(to Jack)

Come on. I need you to guard the door, Jack.

He hesitates.

SUZY

That knife's a lot bigger than the one you described Malcolm having.

MAGGIE

Yeah, it's mine. I've been carrying it ever since we first went into that shelter. Never had to use it until now.

(to Irene)

Even the worst of the poor souls we came across never threatened to destroy our lives and take our boy away from us.

(to Jack)

The door?

SUZY

I don't think any of this is necessary.

MAGGIE

You don't.

SUZY

No. And it's not right either. It just makes things more complicated. I get what you've been through.

MAGGIE

How's that possible when you've heard so a little about it?

SUZY

I've heard enough to know I don't want to cause you any more harm. But that knife changes things. Are you willing to hurt us with that? If you are then I don't think you're someone that child should be with.

MAGGIE

He's been with me for almost five years. Listen, I don't want to hurt you. In fact, I think I'm warming up to you. You've shown a depth of understanding that your superior here seems to lack.

SUZY

She has a lot more responsibility.

MAGGIE

Whatever. The point is I think you might be open to other people's view points and the fallout from their unique situations. And she just seems emotionally stunted.

SUZY

But she isn't. Not really.

IRENE

It's okay.

SUZY

No it's not. She doesn't know anything about who you really are.

IRENE

And you do?

SUZY

I know you care.

IRENE

About what?

SUZY

The kids for one thing.

IRENE

That's what you think?

SUZY

Absolutely. Are you saying you don't?

IRENE

No I'm saying I'm just not as sure as you seem to be.

(to Maggie)

I used to care. You have to, right. Or what's the point. I mean it sure isn't the money. Even at my level. Not with what you have to deal with. You, for example.

(MORE)

IRENE (CONT'D)

If I'd known at the beginning of the year that I'd have to deal with you, I might have slit my fucking throat!!

She approaches maniacally and Maggie backs up.

IRENE (CONT'D)

Okay!! Do it, do it, do it! Cut me!!

MAGGIE

(quietly)

Cut your throat? Too much ... You're kinda young to be suffering from burnout, aren't you?

IRENE

Yeah. I am. And I'm not even close to being financially prepared for retirement.

(deep breath)

But... in the meantime I have a job to do. And part of my job is to contact the authorities when I see or hear anything that--

JACK

"The authorities..."

(to Maggie)

Yeah, see how it sounds when other people use it.

(to Irene)

It sounds too scary. You'll just be talking to people who have certain kinds of job. And certain kinds of opinions.

IRENE

Maybe. But I'm still supposed to inform them.

SUZY

Or maybe you're really just supposed to keep an open mind.

MAGGIE

And you should still have all the information, shouldn't you? I mean before you do what you think you have to do.

SUZY

Information about his real parents you mean?

IRENE

So the authorities won't send him back to them. So they won't be able to harm him anymore?

MAGGIE

It's not just about what his "real parents" *will* do. It's about what they've already done. And what can't be undone without us in his life.

SUZY

(to Irene)
She might be right.

IRENE

They don't even have electricity. They carry knives for protection.

MAGGIE

(moving closer to Irene)
They gave him meth when he was five. *They* liked to watch what it did to him. *They* thought it was funny. He was physically abused by at least three of their insane druggie pals. Two men and one truly fucked up teenaged girl who eventually killed herself by overdosing while she was on his bed with him asleep beside her! Believe that? I know it's hard, but try okay. No food in the house, he ate maybe two or three times a week when his grandfather would bring something over. Grandfather was on disability by the way. Disability he lost when they went on the run. Too much? Think I'm just trying to get to you with this stuff. This shit happens to people! It happened to him. And we're never going to take the chance that it could happen again.

(inhales)

So what are we going to do?

IRENE

Well I suggest we begin with you putting away the knife.

SUZY

I think that would be best too.

JACK

So do I.
(off her look)
(MORE)

JACK (CONT'D)

I'm sure the impulse came from a good place though.

Maggie looks at the knife.

MAGGIE

You hear that. That's how he is about everything. Mr. Positive.

(to Jack)

We never would have made it without you. So many times I just wanted to go to sleep and never wake up.

JACK

But that was before Malcolm.

MAGGIE

Yeah. The time before Malcolm was bleak.

JACK

Worse than bleak.

MAGGIE

What's worse than bleak?

JACK

Hopeless. Even for me it was hopeless.

MAGGIE

Yeah. Hopeless. I'm amazed we kept going.

JACK

Yeah...

MAGGIE

Why did we?

JACK

You just do, don't you? I mean most people do.

(to Irene)

Well maybe not if you're a school principal but--

IRENE

Look I know my...situation is not in any way as bad as what you've been describing, but it's not easy either.

SUZY

(to Jack)

In some ways it's even harder.

MAGGIE

Harder than picking through trash for something to eat? What the fuck has happened in this world that someone with a job and somewhere to live can even say something like that.

SUZY

Yeah. That was stupid. Worse than stupid. But the thing is, sometimes I don't really know what I'm saying. Or doing. I'm really in over my head here. I'm educated and trained and I still don't know what I'm doing with these kids. So there goes that. All the time I spent in school. Wasted. So that's not good. Not as bad as you've been through. But not good. And I guess I'm scared. I mean, you know, scared enough to say something so fucking stupid. And to do what I did to Malcolm. Someone not so scared of not knowing what she was doing... wouldn't have done it.

JACK

We forgive you.
 (to Maggie)
 Don't we, Hon?

MAGGIE

I think we're way beyond that now. Blame. Forgiveness. We're on to a whole other issue. Maybe it's the one we were always dealing with. You know, the real one.

IRENE

Which is?

MAGGIE

Well what do we value most? The convenient truth or the human truth?

JACK

Maybe there's a compromise we can work out. You know, about the situation with Malcolm and telling people who'll have opinions about it. And then us having to take off so you'll never find him. I mean taking him out of the only house he's lived in for years and out of this school. There has to be some other choice here.

SUZY

(to Irene)

Can we make some kind of deal about that?

IRENE

You mean one that doesn't put us all in jail? I don't know.

SUZY

Well aren't there some things worth risking jail for?

IRENE

No. Well maybe. But she has to put down the knife first.

SUZY

(to Maggie)

Can you do that?

MAGGIE

I'd like to, but I think it'd put me at a real disadvantage.

IRENE

God. Some of the things you say...

MAGGIE

What's that mean?

IRENE

It means holding that thing on us puts you at an *actual* disadvantage. Why don't you get that?

JACK

It makes you look desperate, Mag.

MAGGIE

I *am* desperate.

(to Irene)

Look why not just think of it as my friend?

IRENE

Your friend. The knife is... your friend.

MAGGIE

Yeah, I mean I don't have a lot of friends, and you have so many.

SUZY

She doesn't actually.

(to Irene)

That was just a guess.

MAGGIE

I don't mean people you Facebook or do lunch with. I'm talking about your real friends. The law, your unions, all your rules. Rules about the things you're supposed to do and the things you're not, no matter what the circumstances. You have just about everything in your world backing you up. And I just have the knife.

JACK

And me.

MAGGIE

That goes without saying.

JACK

Which is why she didn't say it, I guess.

MAGGIE

Don't be hurt. I don't have time to buck you up right now.

(to Suzy)

He's kind of vulnerable because I keep threatening to divorce him.

SUZY

Why?

MAGGIE

It's something I say to relieve stress. I sometimes need to believe that there's a better life out there for me.

JACK

With a better man.

MAGGIE

No. Just with a better job.

IRENE

Put the knife down.

MAGGIE

I'm considering it, like I said.

IRENE

Stop considering it, and just do it.

SUZY

She means she wants you to trust us.

IRENE

Stop telling them what I mean.

MAGGIE

No. It's good. It's like she's a translator for you. Because you have such difficulty relaying your true feelings. It's because of that thing I mentioned before about you being emotionally stunted.

IRENE

Jesus...

MAGGIE

So do you?

IRENE

Do I what?

MAGGIE

Want us to trust you?

IRENE

I guess so.

SUZY

(to Maggie)

She does. Besides, what choice do you have? Are you really planning to kill us?

JACK

Of course not.

MAGGIE

Jack. Please. We're negotiating here.

SUZY

Over what? Whether you're going to actually use that thing on us? Please. None of us believe that.

IRENE

I might.

SUZY

Really? Come on. Help me out here!

IRENE

Okay no. I don't really think she'd put a knife in our hearts.

SUZY

Right.

(to Maggie)

So what's its purpose then?

MAGGIE

It makes you listen to me on a whole other level.

JACK

Put it down, Sweetie. I'm pretty sure you've got their full attention.

MAGGIE

Yeah. But look at what it took.
(to Irene and Suzy)
This is what happens when people feel they aren't being listened to.

She puts the knife down.

SUZY

Okay...So now can we move forward and try to find a solution here?

MAGGIE

Fine.

IRENE

But we're going to need some kind of assurance.

MAGGIE

About what?

SUZY

Malcolm's continued safety.

MAGGIE

Well that's rich. Coming from someone who recently attacked him.

IRENE

Hey. Lay off her. Maybe if you'd told us how fucked up your lives are right from the beginning, she would have made certain concessions.

MAGGIE

Meaning?

SUZY

I would have tried to be more patient with him. But...

(to Irene)

...what we do now is really all that's important.

IRENE

At the very least there are some things we'll have to investigate on our own.

MAGGIE

Like?

SUZY

Can we see your house?

MAGGIE

Can we see yours?

JACK

That was a reasonable request, Hon.

MAGGIE

Of course it was.

(to Suzy)

I was just curious about your decor.

IRENE

And your job? Is it secure?

JACK

Well that's a tough one. I haven't entirely given up on a writing career.

MAGGIE

He's not leaving his job. Ever.

(to Jack)

Under any circumstances.

IRENE

Where is it?

JACK

Oh it's pretty close by.

SUZY

She means we'll need the name of the company.

JACK

It doesn't have a name.

IRENE

What's that mean?

JACK

It's just a warehouse.

IRENE

A warehouse that doesn't belong to anyone?

JACK
No. It belongs to some guys.

IRENE
Some guys who...?

JACK
Store stuff there.

IRENE
Stuff like?

MAGGIE
Okay I know where this is leading,
and I think we need to step back.

IRENE
Actually I think we need to keep
going.

MAGGIE
I just mean step back to the
circumstances around him needing
this particular job. No matter what
it was.

JACK
We were starving.

MAGGIE
Well not actually starving.

JACK
I was. I was starving.

MAGGIE
Because you were giving most of
your food to Malcolm. That's the
kind of guy he is. Keep that in
mind, okay.

IRENE
Okay. Got it.

MAGGIE
I mean keep it in my mind while we
discuss the warehouse.

JACK
And what's in it.

SUZY
Which is what?

JACK
Hot.

SUZY
You mean stolen.

JACK
Yeah. Probably.

MAGGIE
We're not actually sure. We never asked.

JACK
Not asking was one of the terms of my employment.

MAGGIE
Pretty much the only one actually.

JACK
Yeah. Well I had to show up. But beyond that...

MAGGIE
Are you keeping our situation in mind?

JACK
The fact that I was starving.

MAGGIE
And the reason why.

SUZY
I am.

IRENE
I'm trying.

MAGGIE
Just trying? Maybe that's because you've never even been close to starving.

IRENE
Either that. Or I've never worked for criminals and can't picture how I ever would.

SUZY
And she's saying that's only because you've never been starving.

IRENE
Okay. But does it matter. He works for criminals and that's not something we can get behind.

SUZY
No. But can we just ignore it?

IRENE
Maybe you should ask your father
that.

(to Maggie)
He's a cop.

MAGGIE
Great.
(to Jack)
We're screwed.

SUZY
No. I won't say anything to him.

IRENE
Not yet you mean.

SUZY
Not ever. There's plenty I don't
tell him. Do you think I'd want him
to know how much weed I smoke. I
mean if I actually smoked weed.

IRENE
Are saying you don't?

SUZY
Do you care?

IRENE
If I did, I'd have to let a third
of the staff go. And then I'd have
to crack down on all the serious
drinkers, and I'm just not up to
it.

SUZY
Exactly. That's something you've
just chosen to ignore then. So now
we have an example of something we
can measure other so-called
transgressions against as we move
forward. I want this to work.

IRENE
If it can.

SUZY
It has to. You heard them. They'll
just take off. And what happens to
Malcolm then?

MAGGIE
Almost anything is possible.

SUZY
 (to Irene)
 Does it really matter who he works
 for.

IRENE
 Suppose they're not crooks. Suppose
 they're terrorists. Who knows what
 they're keeping in that warehouse.

JACK
 Appliances.

MAGGIE
 Mostly washers and dryers.

SUZY
 Yeah so...do we really want to make
 a fuss over stolen appliances?

IRENE
 What happens if they get caught?

SUZY
 Who?

IRENE
 The guys doing the stealing. Then I
 guess there goes his job. I mean if
 he isn't arrested as an accomplice.

MAGGIE
 We've got that covered. He'll
 present himself in a certain way to
 the cops.
 (to Jack)
 Show them.

Jack lets his body slacken and his head kind of droop to the
 side.

JACK
 (in a happtvoice that goes
 along with the posture)
 Hello, officers. What can I do for
 you?

IRENE
 You pretend you're...you're...

SUZY & IRENE/JACK/MAGGIE
 Developmentally dealyed/ Mentally
 challenged/Slow...

JACK
 Works like a charm. I've used it a
 few times in the past to get out of
 trouble with the law.

MAGGIE

Mostly for shoplifting.

JACK

The police get kind of embarrassed,
and they let me go.

SUZY

Great. So that solves that problem.
We'd just have to find him a new
job. And how hard can that be?

JACK

Pretty hard.

MAGGIE

Almost impossible.

JACK

But we'll try to stay open to the
possibility.

SUZY

(to Irene)

Can't ask for more than that,
right.

IRENE

I guess not. So in this world you
have us all in together now, we're
kind of like their guardian angels.

MAGGIE

Think of it as an adoption. Like we
did with Malcolm. You're adopting
our whole family.

SUZY

Or maybe we're just helping out.

MAGGIE

I'd feel better if you thought of
it as an adoption, it'd draw us
closer together.

JACK

I think that's true. And getting
back to other job options for me.
I'm actually a writer, like I said.
Well not actually. More like
hypothetically.

IRENE

You're a hypothetical writer?

JACK

Yeah. But that's probably the case
with a lot of people.

(MORE)

JACK (CONT'D)

And it concerns me. It really does.
It's a thing I'd like to deal with
at some point.

MAGGIE

He's talking about how most people
aren't in the jobs they've always
dreamed about having.

(to Jack)

But that's a whole other matter.

JACK

A matter that addresses the
widespread depression and
disorientation in society today.
But who can really deal with that.

MAGGIE

Certainly not you. No offense.

JACK

Absolutely none taken.

(to Others)

Let's just say that I have
aspirations to move beyond the
hypothetical.

IRNE

Okay. Sure. We'll keep that in
mind.

MAGGIE

(to Jack)

She's humouring you.

(to Irene)

No need for that, dear. If we say
something you don't fully
understand, just ask for
clarification.

IRENE

Okay here's something I'd like a
little clarification on. What about
his school records? How long did
you think you'd get away with
telling us they were sent to you.

MAGGIE

I don't know. I don't have the
luxury of engaging in long term
thinking.

IRENE

(in her face)

Not a good enough answer!

MAGGIE

Jesus. Calm down.

IRENE

How do we move him through the system. Get him into high school. University. He'll need transcripts.

MAGGIE

We'll make some up.

IRENE

Another bad response!

MAGGIE

Come on. What's the harm in that?

IRENE

It's illegal.

MAGGIE

Really? Where's the victim?

IRENE

You're looking at her. If we get caught my life is over.

(off Suzy)

She'll be okay. She has a family she can lean on. I don't have anyone.

MAGGIE

Big surprise. Sorry. That just slipped out.

SUZY

I'll do it. You just show me what the transcripts look like, and I'll keep them up to date.

JACK

Another problem solved.

IRENE

Yeah right. Just like that. Magical thinking seems to be the foundation on which you've built your entire lives. Keep on keeping on and it'll all work out somehow.

JACK

We didn't have much choice. Stuff just got thrown at us. We did our best to deal with it but then--

IRENE

My point is, it's fraud!

MAGGIE

But with no victim. That's important. No one gets hurt. Some rules just get broken.

IRENE

By us. Not by you. By us.

JACK

And we appreciate the fact that you're even considering doing that.

MAGGIE

Yeah. I mean considering the narrowness of your life experience.

IRENE

What the hell do you know about my life experience. You think it's all been a cakewalk for me. I put myself through school. I went bankrupt twice. And I had a serious illness to deal with.

SUZY

She's diabetic. The worst kind.

IRENE

You're not supposed to know that.

SUZY

People talk.

IRENE

Right.
(to Jack)
What about your house? It was abandoned, right. So I assume it's not in great shape.

MAGGIE

We're working on it.

SUZY

Does it have heat?

JACK

It will when we have electricity. It's all baseboards.

SUZY

And they're in good shape?

JACK

Well it's hard to tell because--

IRENE

You don't have electricity. Right.
She was probably asking about the
wiring.

SUZY

It should be checked.

IRENE

(to Jack)
Can you do that?

MAGGIE

This is starting to sound like an
inquisition.

IRENE

That's because it is.
(to Jack)
Do you know anything about wiring?

JACK

I could buy a book.

IRENE

You mean steal it. You could steal
a book.

SUZY

That's a bit harsh.

JACK

No. She's right. Those self help
books aren't cheap. I'd be inclined
to steal it.

IRENE

And all that's gotta stop, okay.
All the criminal behaviour. No more
shoplifting or guarding stolen
washing machines...

SUZY

And no more pretending to be a
lawyer or anyone else. It's not
good.

IRENE

And eventually you'll get caught.
(to Jack)
And not even that tasteless
impression of a...a person who's...

SUZY

Mentally challenged.

IRENE

Right. Not even that will save you.

MAGGIE

We can't stop doing what we need to do to survive.

JACK

We're firm on that. Even the garden we've put in was planted with that in mind.

IRENE

Really.

JACK

Root vegetables. Because they store better.

SUZY

(to Irene)

Smart, right?

IRENE

Effing brilliant. Look, there's time to humour them. They need jobs. Real ones.

(to Jack)

What did you do before you were...

JACK

Terminated? I worked for the city government.

IRENE

Doing what?

JACK

I'm not sure. I worked in the planning department, but I was never given anything to plan so--

IRENE

But you're a planner.

JACK

No. And I guess they found that out. I was transferred from there to the parks department because they were understaffed.

IRENE

And at the parks department you...?

JACK

Picked things up.

SUZY

Trash?

JACK

No. I picked things up in a truck and took them to wherever they were needed for some reason I hardly ever understood

SUZY

So you have a driver's license.

JACK

I did. But I had an accident and lost it, so that's why--

SUZY

You were...

JACK/SUZY

Terminated.

MAGGIE

Look let's just cut to the chase here. He has no skills. I mean none that would help anyone in the short run. He has an artistic personality

JACK

But without the bullshit.

MAGGIE

Yeah there's none of that, thank god. But basically he's pretty useless. Even at shoplifting. That's why he learned to do...

(demonstrates head droop)

...that thing.

SUZY

Don't do that anymore okay. Neither of you. I hate it.

IRENE

(to Maggie)

What about you?

SUZY

She means for work.

MAGGIE

I was a psychiatric nurse. But it seriously fucked me up, and I had an early burn out. So there's no way I'm going back. You got that? No fucking, dildo licking way at all!

(smiles)

Besides Malcolm needs me at home.

SUZY

Yeah. That makes sense. That's good.

(to Irene)

So we just need to find something for him.

IRENE

Well I'm probably going to regret this, but maybe we can use him here at school.

JACK

As a writing teacher? That'd be unbelievable.

IRENE

Yes. It would.

(to Suzy)

I might be able to get them to hire another janitor for us.

SUZY

That'd be great.

IRENE

Maybe he could even help... whathisname, Spiro learn English. Get those parents off my back.

SUZY

A win win.

IRENE

I'm still pretty concerned about their wiring.

SUZY

I could get my dad to look at it.

MAGGIE

The cop? Bad idea.

IRENE

Yeah. I'll do it.

MAGGIE

You know about that stuff?

IRENE

One of the things I had to learn to do for myself because I have no friends.

MAGGIE

Or a husband.

SUZY
Or a wife. She's gay.

IRENE
What?

SUZY
Well you are, aren't you.

Suzy's phone rings.

SUZY (CONT'D)
I have to take this.

IRENE
Just tell him you're not quitting.

SUZY
It's my father.

Suzy leaves.

MAGGIE
(to Irene)
That's interesting. I mean that
you're gay.

IRENE
Gimme a break.

MAGGIE
You're one of us.

IRENE
What?

MAGGIE
You've been driven into a corner by
ignorance and fear, and there's
only so much of that a person can
take. I've seen what it can do to
people. I was a psychiatric nurse,
as I just said.

IRENE
And you treated a lot of insane gay
people, did you?

MAGGIE
Just one. But it was a very sad and
painful experience.

IRENE
For you?

MAGGIE
For him *and* me.

JACK

It was. Many nights she couldn't sleep and she wasn't eating much and she always looked so...sad.

Maggie touches him affectionately.

MAGGIE

(to Irene)

But I'm not sure the guy was actually gay. At least that's not how he identified. He was transgendered. And by the way, the word insane is just as inappropriate as the word retarded. Which is what you were trying not to say a while ago. I'll give you credit for that. But it's troubling that you're so unevolved. Just below the surface, I mean. You present well enough superficially to get by, I suppose.

IRENE

I think you've missed something here. I'm trying to help you.

MAGGIE

And that means I should censor myself?

IRENE

Yeah. Please do that.

JACK

She always speaks the truth.

IRENE

Except when she's lying. Which is reasonably often apparently.

Suzy comes back in.

SUZY

Okay here's something else we have to deal with. Malcolm's been arrested.

IRENE

For what?

SUZY

He was seen with his knife.

IRENE

(to Maggie)

You let him keep it?

MAGGIE

Well he was still in danger as far as I was concerned.

SUZY

Anyway he asked the cops, one of whom was my father, to get in touch with me.

JACK

Smart boy. We don't have cell phones.

SUZY

(to Irene)

We have to get them one.

IRENE

Sure. Put it on the list.

SUZY

Anyway that was my dad asking what he should do.

MAGGIE

He should let him go. What's all the fuss?

SUZY

Malcolm was threatening a group of boys.

MAGGIE

You mean a gang. "Group of boys" means gang in this city. A gang of nasty little turds probably.

IRENE

Do we know that?

SUZY

Witnesses say they were definitely harassing Malcolm.

MAGGIE

(to Jack)

There you go.

JACK

It happens a lot. They sense his vulnerability.

SUZY

But he'd been seen with the knife so...the police had to take him in.

MAGGIE

An overreaction. What ever happened to the benefit of the doubt?

SUZY

I'm going to go get him. Either of you want to come with me?

JACK

I'll go.

MAGGIE

I'm better dressed.

JACK

That's true.

SUZY

No. Let him come. He's less likely to annoy them.

JACK

Oh I can't actually go into the station. I might be recognized.

SUZY

You mean from your previous encounters.

IRENE

Previous encounters. Sounds like he was dating some of them. They've probably got a wanted poster of him on their wall.

SUZY

Could that be true?

JACK

Oh yes. I'll just wait for you down the street.

SUZY

Sure.

They start out.

IRENE

About that job. It'd be from seven to four.

Jack stops. So does Suzy.

JACK

(a little worried)
Seven in the morning?

MAGGIE

You can do it.

JACK

Sure. I know that. I'll just have to get myself psyched.

SUZY

Good man.

She leads him out.

MAGGIE

He'll do fine. He'll be a credit to our family. All five of us.

IRENE

What the hell are you talking about?

MAGGIE

Well that's what we'll be. We'll be bonded by all our infractions. Just like a normal family.

IRENE

Normal. We'd be anything but fucking normal.

MAGGIE

Come on. Given your status you should be more open to different family structures. In fact, an outside observer could think we were the ones adopting you, looking after you.

IRENE

Because I'm a lesbian.

MAGGIE

A very troubled lesbian. You remind me a lot of my patient.

IRENE

The transgendered one.

MAGGIE

Who else. Only real difference is that he was open about his psychic pain. And you're defeated by yours. Boy he had it rough. It was way worse back then for those people.

IRENE

You think it's a lot better for them now, do you?

MAGGIE

Absolutely. You don't?

IRENE

Not that much.

MAGGIE

Well you'd know better than me, wouldn't you?

IRENE

Why?

MAGGIE

Right. You're just a lesbian. So you wouldn't necessarily know anything about that. Unless you've done some research.

IRENE

About what?

MAGGIE

Making the change. Come to think of it, I bet you have. You'd probably do better as a man.

IRENE

And you'd probably do better as a mute.

MAGGIE

Come on. Admit it.

IRENE

What's wrong with you?

The lights start to fade

MAGGIE

Where should I start? Come on. We're family. You must have given it *some* thought.

IRENE

No. I haven't.

MAGGIE

Never once? Never once did you think to yourself "I wish I were a man."

IRENE

I think *that* all the time. But it's different.

MAGGIE

How?

IRENE

You know how, for godsake. When women think that it's about income. And respect. And safety.

MAGGIE

Yeah. But for you it might also mean going all the way. I mean you're already half-way there, right.

IRENE

That's so fucking ignorant!

MAGGIE

Relax. I was just being provocative. You know, trying to get at the truth. The truth is very big with me.

IRENE

Except when you're lying about everything.

MAGGIE

Not everything.

IRENE

Almost everything.

MAGGIE

Not the important stuff.

IRENE

Especially the important stuff.

MAGGIE

Well yeah, *that* important stuff. But not the really important stuff. Do you require some clarification on what that means?

IRENE

No. I don't.

MAGGIE

I think you do.

IRENE

No I'm okay. Honest.

MAGGIE

Are you sure. It's all right if you're not. I don't mind explaining. Really I don't.

Blackout

