Piece by Piece
(Lights up on a living room with a couch, coffee table, and kitchenette in the background. CLAUDE is laying belly-down on the light blue circular rug in the center of the room, facing the audience. The rug is covered in wooden pieces and screws, sorted in messy piles. A half-empty bottle of whiskey sits on the coffee table behind them that the two of them have been sharing. KRISTEN is flipping through a copy of “The Sound and the Fury”. CLAUDE holding out a flimsy paper manual on how to build a crib. Both look extremely exhausted.)

KRISTEN
You strugglin’ over there, big guy?
(KRISTEN shuts the book with a loud thud and slinks off the couch to lie side by side next to CLAUDE, who is clearly frustrated by KRISTEN’S arrival.)
Let me see what we’re looking at here.
(She reaches for the manual, but CLAUDE pulls it away and continues to look over it.)
Alright, then. Be like that.

CLAUDEn
I’m just trying to sort the pieces out into piles and weave my way through these Swedish instructions. I bought this crib in America, so shouldn’t the instructions come in English!?

(KNISTEN (condescending)
It’s Ikea, babe. It’s a Swedish crib.

(CL AUDE sits up and KRISTEN follows, leaning into CLAUDE’s shoulder in a cute way.)

CLAUDEn
Why don’t you go back to your book? I got this.

KRISTEN
You’ve been working at this for 30 minutes and you’ve only managed to sort the pieces.

(CL AUDE (still frustrated)
I’m working on it.

KRISTEN
I know, just...

(KRISTEN takes the manual from CLAUDE and begins to pick up pieces from the pile.)

(CL AUDE (raising his voice)
Kristen, please!
(calmer)

(CL AUDE stands up, grabs the bottle and moves over to the sofa. He takes a drink and picks up the book and begins to flip through it. KRISTEN puts down the pieces and stares at CLAUDE.)
KRISTEN

I wouldn’t call Faulkner a “sit on your ass” kind of a writer, but you have fun.

(CLAUDE throws his feet up on the coffee table in an extremely snotty way. KRISTEN laughs.)

Is that an impression of me? Wow... okay. Real mature. You done?

CLAUDE

(looking coyly over the book, acting prim and proper, imitating her)

With what? Oh, with my chapter? Actually, I just finished the whole book. Yeah, this Faulkner guy writes some really light stuff. You strugglin’ down there, baby doll? Let me come down there and help you since you haven’t accomplished anything in the five minutes it took me to read...

(flipping quickly through the book)

The Sound and the Fury.

(KRISTEN laughs. CLAUDE is trying his best not to break, but does.)

KRISTEN

You’re funny...and a royal ass. Get down here and help me.

(CLAUDE puts the book and bottle back down on the coffee table and sits back down next to KRISTEN. Throughout the next conversation, they switch between trying to put pieces together and looking at the manual, confused.)

CLAUDE

(gesturing to the book)

So that’s for school, right?

KRISTEN

Yeah, yeah. It’s good, you should read it.

CLAUDE

I would if I had the time.

KRISTEN

You don’t work all the time.

CLAUDE

Yeah, but when I’m not, I spend doing work around here, making sure our son has a place to go when I’m not around.

(They stop trying to build the crib and KRISTEN looks back at CLAUDE, frustrated.)

KRISTEN

I do all of that.

CLAUDE

You watch me do all that. Kristen, you haven’t so much as touched a dirty dish since we moved in.

KRISTEN

I don’t live here.
CLAUDE
But the least you could do is, I don’t know, dust the furniture or something when you are.

KRISTEN
I do it when I have time.

(CLAUDE is clearly angered by KRISTEN’s last line and starts to try and jam two pieces of the crib together. KRISTEN continues, noticing, but not acknowledging.)
You think that college life is so easy, that I do nothing. I go to class five days a week and I work my ass off just so one of us can have a future.

(CLAUDE drops the pieces he’s holding with a clatter. He’s clearly angry and yet he can’t seem to get words out.)

CLAUDE
Y-you mean that?

KRISTEN
Yes, I do. I think that our first priority should be getting me a stable, well-paying job. Of course it will take awhile to pay off the loans and...

CLAUDE
(quiet, tense)
I don’t give a fuck about the job part.
(hurt)
You said I’d never have a future?

KRISTEN
(defensive)
I didn’t mean that. I didn’t even say that.

CLAUDE
(still quiet)
Maybe you’re right. Maybe I won’t have a future. But at least I’ll sleep at night knowing that I tried to be a good parent, that I did the hard thing, giving up everything…
(starting to cry)
Fuck me! I was gonna be a pilot, Kristen. I was gonna come home and tell you stories about foreign military bases and boot camp. I was going to give you everything you ever wanted. And now...

(Over the course of the dialogue, KRISTEN has started to become sympathetic. She takes CLAUDE’s hand, but he pulls away.)

KRISTEN
We have a beautiful baby boy. That’s all I could have asked for.

CLAUDE
Then why am I still building this stupid crib?!

(CLAUDE stands up and starts kicking the piles. KRISTEN watches and begins to get angry.)
You’re acting like a child.

Because you treat me like one.

(CLAUDE pulls himself together.)

I’m sorry.

(He laughs pitifully.)

I just needed to say so many things...

And in doing so, completely ignored how I feel.

I wasn’t...

You’re not the only one “doing the hard thing.”

(fast-paced rant)

I wish I could have more of a relationship with my son that wasn’t seeing him on weekends or pumping in front of my roommate, knowing full well that my partner’s the one who’s gonna give him the stuff. I mean, I wish I could, I don’t know, live a little on campus, go to parties and shit, but no, I don’t. Also, the 4-hour commute is shit. Act high and mighty all you want, but you aren’t the only one doing this.

Go to bed then. He’s in there, asleep on the single. I can sleep on the pull-out tonight.

I’m not used to sleeping with him. I could roll over and crush him.

Problem-solve.

I have to get up early and head back to campus tomorrow. I might wake him up.

I don’t know then. Figure it out. I figured it out by myself.

(KRISTEN grabs the bottle of whiskey off the coffee table and gets up.)

I will then, asswipe. See you in the morning. And that crib better be finished, since you’re such a great parent.

And you’re a great mother?!!
(KRISTEN storms off stage right.)

CLAUDE

(to himself, mumbling)
Fine, I’ll finish her stupid crib. Of course, I screwed up the piles. 
(He picks up the manual and begins to read through it.)
Is Swedish even a language? How do you read this shit?
(He sighs and lays down on his back. Swedish parts to be read as American as possible.)
“Dra spaken nedåt och kolsyra vattnet till dess du hör ett tydligt visslande ljud.” And a picture of two pieces just magically coming together. And I have to finish this tonight because Kristen says so.
(He looks over to the bedroom. There is silence.)
I mean, maybe the manual’s magical.
(to the bedroom, whisper-yelling)
Hey, Kristen! Is Sweden the place with fairies?
(silence)
Fine, fuck you too.

(CLAUDE sets down the manual, stands up, and goes over to the fridge. He pulls out a beer and takes a big sip. While this is happening, the manual suddenly flips back to the starting page. CLAUDE notices and jumps, quickly rushing over to pick up the manual.)

CLAUDE (con’t)
What the fuck was that? Swedish fucking fairies, I knew it.
(flips page)
(flips page)
“This first rule of building anything is to get some help.” That makes sense, I guess. “Of course, don’t chase off help when it comes, and especially don’t try and assess your wife’s parenting abilities. She’s trying her best.”
(Beat. CLAUDE turns the manual over, as if looking for some kind of identification on the side.)
What the fuck is this manual?
(He flips back to the relevant page.)
“The second step is to distribute the work evenly. You have to work together, dipshit. Listen to her.” Okay, fair point, manual. But this isn’t really specific to building a crib.
(The manual turns the page on its own this time.)
“The third and final step is to remember who you’re doing this for. Sometimes, you can’t save a relationship but you’ve got to push through for the little guy in the room next to you. P.S. It’s fucking trolls, dude. We’re known for our trolls.”

(There is a long silence as CLAUDE slowly turns to the back cover and sets down the manual. He looks to the bedroom.)

CLAUDE (con’t)

(looking at the bedroom, to the manual)
I don’t want to wake her up, though.
(with newfound determination)
I won’t. I can do this by myself. I’ve taken care of Vincent for this long by myself. I’ve made the money, Kristen has done nothing. I don’t need her.

(A baby’s cry is heard offstage right, along with KRISTEN cursing.)
KRISTEN (offstage)
(frustrated, sad)
I knew I was going to fuck it up somehow. Damn it!

(KRISTEN rushes in holding VINCENT, wrapped in a bundle of sheets, stopping just in front of seated CLAUDE.)

KRISTEN
Don’t get any ideas...argh! I really don’t want your help, but he won’t stop crying. So here.

(She holds out VINCENT angrily. CLAUDE looks down at the manual, then up at KRISTEN. Suddenly, a spark of inspiration hits CLAUDE.)

CLAUDE
(to the manual)
I see what you’re doing, you sly dog.

KRISTEN
I’m not doing anything, it’s just he won’t stop crying!

(CLAUDE sits open-legged, gesturing for KRISTEN to sit down in front of him. She does, reluctantly, and CLAUDE wraps his arms around her and VINCENT as she pulls VINCENT to her chest.)

CLAUDE
Here, you need to loosen up. Don’t grip him so hard.

(She relaxes a bit, but is still tense. VINCENT continues to cry.)

CLAUDE (con’t)
Yep, okay. That’s good.

(CLAUDE, arms under VINCENT, begins to rock the group, slowly and gently. VINCENT’s crying begins to subside.)
KRISTEN
Why are you being so nice? Didn’t you say that I wasn’t a good mother?

CLAUDE
You’re not...yet. You just haven’t been given a fair chance to be.

KRISTEN
(wearily)
Okay?
(VINCENT, by this point, has stopped crying.)

CLAUDE
I think we need to relook at the way we do this parenting thing from here on. You clearly need to get home more often and we both need lighter workloads. More importantly, though, I think we need more time together, just us.

KIRSTEN
(relaxed)
Like our old date nights?

CLAUDE
Yeah, like that. Just time together, not doing work or worrying about this little bugger, but focusing on us.

KIRSTEN
You’ve really grown up in the 15 minutes I was back there.

CLAUDE
I guess working on the crib really got me thinking about us.

KIRSTEN
(light, chuckling)
Of course, it doesn’t look like you got much work done on it.

CLAUDE
I got caught up in the manual. Besides, I need help. I can’t do this by myself.

KIRSTEN
Really?

CLAUDE
Yeah.

(CLAUDE pinches VINCENT’s cheeks.)
Look at our little guy. He’s passed out. You’re pretty good at this, babe.

(KIRSTEN stands up to leave. CLAUSE follows after.)

KIRSTEN
I guess I’ll put Vincent back to bed.

CLAUDE
Why don’t you let me handle that? No offense, but I’m not sure if you’re that good yet.

(KIRSTEN gives VINCENT to CLAUSE who exits stage right. KIRSTEN sits with the pieces of the crib laying in front of her. She lightly picks up a piece in her right hand, studying it carefully, before picking up another in her left. She puts them together and they click.)
KRISTEN

(excited)
Oh...okay. So that’s two pieces together.

(CLAUDE reenters, stage right, and sits next to her.)

CLAUDE

Doing it without the manual?

KRISTEN

Yeah. I mean, it’s in Swedish, right? How much help can it be?

CLAUDE

(looking out into the audience)
You have no idea.

(back to KRISTEN)
Hey, those two pieces weren’t together when I left? You figuring it out?

KRISTEN

I guess.

(She holds up a piece to CLAUDE.)
I need one that matches this one.

(CLAUDE immediately finds it and puts it together with KRISTEN’s).

KRISTEN

Sick! Okay, next one.

(They continue to pick up pieces and put them together. The manual is laying in front of them. It ruffles through the pages one last time and the lights go down. End of Play.)

Short note on Vincent:
Vincent can be played either by an infant or just a bundle of sheets, with sound effects offstage. If Vincent is a bundle of sheets, a speaker can be placed within the bundle, playing “cooing” sound effects.
The First Day

By: Ivana Pierce, Raizel Demaria, Krysha Pierce
(MEAGAN is walking through the high school hallway with her older sister, ANNA on the first day of school. They are approaching DANIEL and TEACHER in the classroom.)

ANNA:
Welcome to adulthood, sis.

MEAGAN:
Thanks, I hate it.

ANNA:
(Laughing.)
It’ll get better, I promise. If you ever need to talk about anything, I, as your favorite sister, am always here for you.

MEAGAN:
You're my only sister.

ANNA:
(Shrugs.)
Hey, you take what you can get.

MEAGAN:
Well thanks, but I think instead, I may just keep everything bottled up right here,

(Point to her heart.)
And I’ll eventually explode.

ANNA:
That’s a completely foul proof plan. I see absolutely no flaws in it, whatsoever.

(ANNA laughs and walks offstage.)

TEACHER:
Now, if you only remember one thing I have told you, please remember not to lose this agenda book. If you do, you will not be allowed to walk in the hallways for any reason at all.

DANIEL:
(To himself.)
Okay, great. So now, if I have to go cry in the bathroom, I have to collect myself enough to remember where I put the smallest book I’ve ever seen, and then, rouse up enough courage to ask to get it signed. This should be fun.

TEACHER:
Sorry, what was that?
DANIEL:
Oh, sorry, nothing.

TEACHER:
That’s what I thought.

MEAGAN:
He was just telling me where the geometry classroom is.

TEACHER:
(Fondly.)
Freshies. It’s on the fourth floor right next to the pool.

MEAGAN:
There’s a pool?

TEACHER:
No, that was a joke. It’s just down the hall and then it’s the second door on the left.
(Laughing.)
Anyways, could all of the BOCES students please report to the auditorium at this time. Thank you very much.
(She sits down at her desk.)

MEAGAN:
(To DANIEL.)
What the heck is a BOCES?

DANIEL:
I don’t know, man. I think it has something to do with college, but I could be wrong.

MEAGAN:
(Sounding panicked.)
Wait, so did I accidentally sign up for it?
(Increasingly more panicked.)
Do I have to go there now... Do I have to have my agenda signed to go?
(Practically screaming.)
WHERE EVEN IS THE AUDITORIUM?

DANIEL:
(Putting his hands on MEAGAN’s shoulders to steady her.)
Hey, calm down. Just take out your schedule and see if it says BOCES anywhere on it.

MEAGAN:
Phew, okay
(Takes out her schedule.)
It doesn’t say BOCES anyplace on it.
DANIEL:
Then we’re good. Breathe with me.

(They inhale and exhale twice.)

MEAGAN:
What bell do you have lunch?

DANIEL:
Fifth and in highschool they call them “mods.”

MEAGAN:
Great I have it fifth bell—I mean mod, too.

DANIEL:
I’ve heard that the lunch table you choose is the key to having a good school year.

MEAGAN:
That makes no sense. I feel like lunch should be the easiest part of the day.

DANIEL:
(In complete shock.)
NO! The people you sit with, and the table that you sit at, will be the same for the rest of the school year. Besides, I would just die if we were forced to sit with people we don’t like. Or worse: alone.

MEAGAN:
It’s good to know that you’re not dramatic. Why don’t we just sit with Anna and her friends? They're all juniors and I know all of them, so I promise that they're good people.

DANIEL:
Woman, this is why I keep you around.
(Hesitantly.)
Also because you can give me a ride home...maybe?

MEAGAN:
And to think, that this whole time I thought we were becoming real friends.

(Enter Anna. She is about to walk past MEAGAN and DANIEL but MEAGAN stops her.)

MEAGAN:
Anna! Can we sit with you?
ANNA:

Of course—
(She pauses, MEAGAN and DANIEL are both visibly relieved.)
Not! I can’t be seen with a bunch of freshmen! Especially not ones who are so...
(She gestures to DANIEL.)
Tiringly flamboyant. Like, come on. My head already hurts from looking at that
God awful outfit. Maybe try putting a light on when you get dressed tomorrow.

(DANIEL is so embarrassed that he is rendered speechless, he runs
offstage in the other direction on the verge of tears.)

(The school bell rings and the day begins again.)

TEACHER:
Now, if you only remember one thing I have told you, please remember not to
lose this agenda book. If you do, you will not be allowed to walk in the
hallways for any reason at all.

MEAGAN:
(Turning to DANIEL.)
I think we get it. If we are caught in the hallway without our agendas then we
get sent straight to jail, we don’t pass go, and we definitely don’t collect
$200.

DANIEL:
Ha, I was just thinking how stupid the agendas are. Hi, I’m Daniel.

MEAGAN:
What? I Kn-
(She is cut off by the teacher.)

TEACHER:
Sorry, what was that?

DANIEL:
Oh, sorry, nothing.

TEACHER:
That’s what I thought.

MEAGAN:
He was just telling me where the geometry classroom is.

TEACHER:
(Fondly.)
Freshies. It’s on the fourth floor right next to the pool.
There’s a pool?

MEAGAN:

(Flicking DANIEL on the side of the head.)
Dummy there’s no pool, she made the same stupid joke yesterday!

DANIEL:
I literally don’t know what you’re talking about. Why were you in school yesterday?

TEACHER:
Can all the BOCES students please report to the auditorium, all BOCES students to the auditorium thank you.

MEAGAN:
Wait, so they make that announcement every day? That’s going to get super annoying super quickly.

DANIEL:
(Anxiously.)
Oh my goodness, I couldn’t focus on the announcement because you were talking over it. What if it pertained to me?

MEAGAN:
It doesn’t, you’re the one who showed me that! It was about BOCES, which is only a thing for juniors and seniors, so we’re good.

DANIEL:
Oh phew, thank you. What bell do you have lunch?

MEAGAN:
Fifth.

DANIEL:
Great, I have it fifth bell, too.

MEAGAN:
(Desperately.)
Mods... They call them mods!

DANIEL:
So, I’ve heard that the lunch table you choose is the key to having a good school year.

MEAGAN:
So I’ve been told.

DANIEL:
You know, The people you sit with, and the table that you sit at, will be the same for the rest of the school year. Besides, I would just die if we were forced to sit with people we don’t like. Or worse: alone.

MEAGAN:

(Annoyed.)
Would you, would you really? You’d just genuinely die?

(ANNA is about to walk past MEAGAN and DANIEL but MEAGAN stops her.)

Hey Anna!

ANNA:
Hi Meagan, how’s it going?

MEAGAN:
Not too bad, but I would never want to do it again. Could we sit with you?

ANNA:
Of course—

(She pauses, MEAGAN and DANIEL are both visibly relieved.)
Not! I can’t be seen with a bunch of freshmen! Especially not ones who are so..
(She gestures to DANIEL.)
Tiringly flamboyant. Like, come on. My head already hurts from looking at that God awful out-

(MEAGAN interrupts ANNA.)

MEAGAN:
Anna, stop! Daniel, I am so sor-

(DANIEL rushes offstage, not waiting for her to finish her apology. MEAGAN turns to ANNA.)
What the hell?

(She runs after DANIEL. The school bell rings and the day begins once more.)

DANIEL:
What bell do you have lunch?

MEAGAN:
They’re actually called mods, but fifth.

DANIEL:
Great, I have it fifth be- I mean mod, too. So, I’ve heard that the lunch table you choose is the key to having a good school year.
Yes of course. Because everything is going to be the same for the entire year and it would be a truly terrible experience if we were seated alone or with annoying people.

DANIEL:

(Pretending to be touched.)
You get me.

(ANNA is about to walk past MEAGAN and DANIEL and MEAGAN decides to let her pass. ANNA stops walking anyways.)

ANNA:

Hey Meagan, how’s it going?

MEAGAN:

Just peachy.

DANIEL:

I love your bag! It’s super dope. Is there by any chance, a spot for us at your table?

ANNA:

Of course—

(She pauses, MEAGAN and DANIEL are both visibly relieved.)

Not! I can’t be seen with a bunch of freshmen! Especially not ones who are so..

(She moves to gesture to DANIEL. MEAGAN steps dramatically in front of her, removing the gesture from DANIEL’s field of vision and cutting ANNA’s sentence short.)

MEAGAN:

(Obviously stalling.)
Daniel, I absolutely adore your shirt! Y’know, I was planning to wear one that was very similar, but I couldn’t find it.

Thank you?

MEAGAN:

(She begins walking, veering him away from Anna.)
We wouldn’t want to sit with Anna and her friends anyways. Let’s sit by ourselves. I’m sure it won’t be that bad. If it ruins your school year, you can blame me. I take full responsibility. It’s better than being the cause of you having an awful first day. I don’t know why she’s being so mean today, something must have gotten into her. I swear she’s not usually like this.

DANIEL:
I-it’s okay. According to my handy-dandy Mean-o-meter, she wasn’t geared up for much of an insult. I could have taken whatever she planned to have said next.

MEAGAN:
I’m sure you could, but there’s no reason for you to take shit from her. I’m so sorry.

DANIEL:
Don’t be, we’re chillin.’

(They exit the stage together as the school bell rings, the lights fade, and the day ends. When the lights rise, MEAGAN meets with DANIEL in their homeroom.)

DANIEL:
Good morning, sunshine. Could you give me a ride home from school?

MEAGAN:
Of course.

(She sighs as she says:) Finally, a new day.

(They grab their backpacks and walk offstage. The lights fade out.)
The Cavern Blues
(Lights come up, revealing an old man wearing a white gown and slippers sitting at a table, reading a book on stage right. Beside the table is a stack of a few more books. After a moment of silence, a somewhat disheveled man, ADAM, stumbles on from stage left. His shirt is partially untucked, hat crooked, and one pant leg is rolled up to his shin. He looks around worriedly, before slowly approaching the man sitting at the table.)

ADAM
Excuse me, sir, what are you doing? This place is too dangerous for an old man like you.

OLD MAN
Yeah, yeah. Are you one of those folks from the hospital again?

ADAM
(After a pause) Um, no? I don’t really know where I am right now. (ADAM takes a look at his surroundings.)

OLD MAN
You fell down a hole.

ADAM
Yeah, I know that much. I’m still at the construction site, right? Is this a pit they’re excavating or something?

OLD MAN
Oh, a construction site? When I got here this was just a sinkhole in the middle of a field. Weird how this place seems to change over time.

(OLD MAN chuckles, then goes back to reading his book)

ADAM
Wait, how long have you been down here?

OLD MAN
You know, I haven’t thought about that in a while. Not much light gets in, and you can’t see the sun, except during the summer at noon. Temperature is pretty consistent, and I generally stay over here, away from the opening, so I don’t get wet when it rains. Time doesn’t really have much meaning in this place. You lose track pretty quickly when you’re lost in a great book. Let’s see… I’ve read how many books now?
(OLD MAN silently thinks to himself, counting on his fingers)

ADAM
How do you have any books with you? Speaking of that, how do you get food and water?

OLD MAN
So many questions… Well generally, whoever falls down has some supplies with them. I, myself, brought along twelve books when I arrived. There’s plenty of ground water in these walls, as well as worms, which are surprisingly filling. Sometimes, I kill the worms and don’t eat them, but use them as bait for larger, more filling creatures. If I’m lucky, I’ll catch a snake. Once I even caught a vulture!

ADAM
Wait, wait, wait… you’re telling me there are other people in this cave too?

OLD MAN
Of course there are! Well, there were…

(ADAM takes a few steps back from OLD MAN)

They left pretty quickly. I think they were scared off by little old me.

ADAM
Yeah… I’ll see if I can climb back out.

(As ADAM walks out stage left, LESTER stumbles into him and they both fall back onstage.)

LESTER
Ow…

(OLD MAN chuckles)

ADAM
Oh, great. Now there’s three of us. This hole is a safety hazard.

(LESTER looks at OLD MAN, then back at ADAM, confused.)
ADAM CONTINUED

Are you a construction worker? I’m Adam. I fell down just a few minutes ago. What’s your name?

LESTER

Um, my name’s Lester. And no, I’m not a construction worker. That’s an odd question to ask.

ADAM

Well, this hole’s right next to a construction site, so I thought…

LESTER

Weird. I didn’t see no construction. I was actually on my way to my car in the parking garage when I fell in.

(LESTER gets up and brushes himself off.)

A car drove a little too close, so I took a few steps back and down I went into this pit. Then you started going on about some construction gibberish.

ADAM

I don’t remember there being a parking garage…

OLD MAN

(Laughs) Time sure passes pretty quickly down here, doesn’t it?

ADAM

What are you saying, old man?

OLD MAN

Nothing much goes on in this little grotto of mine. When I first fell down, I was surprised at how quickly time passed. Now, I’m used to it. It might not feel like it, but you’ve been standing on that pile of dirt for days now.

ADAM

Seriously? It’s only been a few minutes. You’re the crazy one! I need to get out of here.

(ADAM gets up and runs out, stage left.)
LESTER
What’s wrong with him? Does he think we’re stuck here?

OLD MAN
Bah, he’s just a lunatic; didn’t you see his eyes?

LESTER
I didn’t know you could tell if someone’s crazy just from looking at their eyes. Are you gonna be all right dealing with that guy?

OLD MAN
A long time ago I was forced into a hospital with all kinds of loons and psychos. Eventually I managed to convince the doctors that I didn’t belong there, so they let me out. Every now and then some crazy folk come to take me back there, so I’ve become pretty good at persuading them that I’m in a good state of mind. I can calm down that young man just fine.

LESTER
Well, that’s good, I guess. What is it you’re doing here then? Is there a way out?

OLD MAN
That young boy is probably clawing his way out of here. There’s a much easier tunnel that way (Points to stage right) where you can escape. I hate people like that who disregard everyone but themselves thinking they know the best way to do anything. I’ll be sure to teach him a lesson before he gets back to the surface.

LESTER
Well, it seems like you’ve got it all under control. You might want to put up a warning sign and some tape so that people don’t keep falling into this pit.

(LESTER exits stage right.)

OLD MAN
I’ll get to it one day.

(ADAM stumbles and falls back onto the stage from stage left.)

ADAM
This hole is too deep! You said other people climbed out, old man?
OLD MAN
I don’t remember saying that. You’re the first person to enter this cave since I fell down here some years ago, and quite a rude one at that!

ADAM
What about that other guy… Lester? He was just here. How did he get out?

OLD MAN
Did you bump your head when you fell just now? I haven’t the slightest clue who you’re talking about.

ADAM
You’re messing with me. I’ve got a job to get to and at this rate I’m gonna be late. I have 2 kids in school right now, so I need to get home before they do.

OLD MAN
Do you love them?

ADAM
What the hell are you talking about? Of course I love them!

OLD MAN
Well, it seems to me that this hole might be the result of you focusing on your job and not your kids, and now you’ve lost them both.

ADAM
That makes no sense. None of this makes any sense! Tell me how to get out so I can get back to my life already.

OLD MAN
It’s already been days since you first fell. See? I’m nearly done reading my book! This is your new life unless you plan on digging your way out.

ADAM
Days? It hasn’t been ten minutes!
OLD MAN
You really think you could have come up with that delusion about some guy named Lester in less than ten minutes? Have some faith in your sanity! It’s OK. I started seeing people about three weeks after I entered the cave as well. Your brain will get over it soon, and then you can think rationally about this situation. I’ve come to enjoy my solitude. Well, at least until you showed up.

ADAM
Three weeks? *(ADAM stares at OLD MAN for a few seconds before placing his hands on his head in distress.)* I need to get out of here! I have two little girls who are dependent on me. I have a job that I need to keep so I can pay rent! You can’t tell me it’s already been three weeks! Just a few minutes ago you said it was a couple of days!

OLD MAN
Calm down, son. To me, it seems like none of that really matters much to you anyway. But if you really want to leave, the dirt over there *(Gestures to center upstage)* is where I collect my water. It’s easy to dig and has a direct path to some surface. If you start digging now, you might surface by next week.

ADAM
Oh my God… *(ADAM runs to the center backstage wall and begins digging at it with his hands. As he is facing away, OLD MAN gets up and leaves stage right.)*

Hey, you wouldn’t happen to have a— *(looks over at the empty seat)* … shovel?

*(ADAM gets up and looks around for OLD MAN. He walks to the table where he sat, then to stage left, looking up, out of the hole, and then at his own hands.)*

Hello? HELLO?! Can anybody hear me? Help! What day is it? What time is it? I need to go home and see my kids! I need to keep my job! I need water! GET ME OUT OF HERE!

*(ADAM buries his face in his hands. He sits down into the fetal position and begins rocking back and forth, sobbing. OLD MAN returns from stage right with a new book and sits back down. ADAM looks up and sees OLD MAN.)*

What the hell is this?
OLD MAN
You seem to be overreacting just a little bit. The more time you spend digging instead of sobbing, the sooner you’ll be out of the ground.

ADAM
Where did you go? You were just gone!

(ADAM stands up and walks over to OLD MAN, reaching a hand out to touch him.)

Are you another hallucination?

OLD MAN
Of course I’m not a hallucination! (Slaps ADAM’s hand away) You’re losing your marbles, kid. I’m what’s keeping you sane. Look, I like you. You’re not like that Lester guy, you’re better than him. So, I’m going to tell you what you need to do, and the sooner you do it, the better things will turn out. Just listen to what I say.

ADAM
Lester? I thought you said I made up Lester.

OLD MAN
BOY! What are you going on about? I haven’t said anything about Lester, I don’t even know who that is. I just told you to listen to me and you’re already making up fairytales! You need to get digging right this instant if you want any chance of seeing your kids again.

(ADAM gets up to move back to where he was digging. As he does so, LESTER enters stage right.)

LESTER
(To OLD MAN) Hey, sir.

(ADAM looks at LESTER, then back at OLD MAN, who hasn’t reacted.)

ADAM
(Hesitantly) OK. I’m OK.

(ADAM walks to the upstage wall, gets on his knees, and begins digging again, back facing the audience. Once he starts digging, OLD MAN gets up and walks over to LESTER.)
OLD MAN

What do you need?

LESTER

Well, turns out that weirdo was right about the construction after all. I just wanted to tell you that I could get someone to set up some tape around the edge of this hole if you wanted. I’ve still got half an hour before I’m needed at work.

OLD MAN

That’ll do just fine. Thanks, kid.

(LESTER exits stage right.)

(To ADAM) Hey, you. You’re not a very good digger. Maybe it’d be better if you tried climbing out again. I bet after a few tries, you could figure out a way up to the surface.

ADAM

I could’ve sworn I saw you talking to Lester just now. Am I really going insane?

OLD MAN

If you spend less time worrying about your sanity and more time climbing, you’ll be out before you know it.

(ADAM exits stage left.)

(Laughs) What a buffoon.

(FOREMAN enters from stage right.)

FOREMAN

Hello? You’re not supposed to be down here, sir. This is a construction site. We were about to dump gravel down this hole when some nice young man alerted me to your presence. You need to leave the premises right now.

OLD MAN

Well, I knew this was going to happen sooner or later. Let me just gather up my things. Maybe it’s time I go back to the hospital.
(OLD MAN picks up his books and walks over to FOREMAN.)

FOREMAN

Is there anybody else?

OLD MAN

Nope, just me.

(OLD MAN and FOREMAN exit stage right. Just after, ADAM stumbles on from stage left once again. He looks around, confused.)

ADAM

Hello? Old Man? This hole is too deep for someone like me to climb out of. Hello? Is anyone here? (Pause as ADAM realizes nobody else is here.) Oh no…

(ADAM hears a noise off stage left. He looks over, distressed.)

Oh my God! They’re filling the hole up with gravel! (Shouting) Hello? Can anybody hear me? I’m stuck! What day is it? Where is everybody? Help! Anybody! My name is Adam! I have a job! I have two kids! I have things! I fell down here and I’m stuck! I’m real! This place is real! I’m awake! Please, somebody, tell me something that makes sense! What does it mean? What is any of this?!

(ADAM falls to his knees, then onto his side, lying sideways, knees halfway up to his chest, hands on his face.)

What does it all mean... What does it mean?

(ADAM begins sobbing. Lights dim.)

FIN
“Dream School”

(The stage is split in half, stage left being JAKE’s room and stage right being LIAM’s room)

(JAKE is sitting at his desk at home typing on a computer and saying what he is typing. LIAM is sitting at his desk at home, typing on a computer, and saying what he is typing. The boys don’t acknowledge each other)

JAKE

Name? Well that’s an easy one. Jake Davis.

LIAM


JAKE

Seattle, Washington. Why do I want to attend your college?

(Shakes his head)

How am I supposed to explain that this is my dream school and my life will basically be over if I don’t get in in 350 words or less?

(Continues typing)

LIAM

...because you have Biochemistry, English, Statistics, History, Spanish...

(looks up from computer)

There are just so many to choose from!

(There is a knock on the door, LIAM’S MOM enters)

LIAM’S MOM

So I think we’re going to leave around 6:30 to go out to dinner, okay?

LIAM

Dinner? There is no time for eating at a time like this! My application is due tonight! And this is my DREAM SCHOOL, mom!

LIAM’S MOM

Alright, alright, carry on. But don’t stress yourself out too much, there are plenty of good colleges out there.
LIAM

(Grumbles)
Mhmm

(LIAM turns back to his computer and continues typing)

JAKE

(While typing)
...and this is why I am the perfect fit for your astronomy department and belong at your school.

(Sighs of relief, JAKE’S DAD walks in)

JAKE’S DAD
Hey, buddy, need any help?

JAKE
Nope, I’m all done, just need to hit the submit button.

(JAKE clicks a button on his computer)

JAKE
Now all we do is wait for the magic to happen.

(JAKE climbs into his bed)

LIAM

(While typing)
...your school is the perfect fit for me and one I would be honored to attend.

LIAM

(To his mom)
I don’t know, this is kind of a stretch for me. What if I don’t get in?

LIAM’S MOM
We’ll find you another option, whatever happens, you’ll be okay.

LIAM
Alright, well I guess I’ll just submit it and see what happens.

(LIAM hits submit button)
LIAM

(Whispers)
Please, please, please.

(Lights blackout on both rooms)
(It is the next day, lights are up on both boys, JAKE is still in bed, LIAM is asleep at his desk leaning on his laptop)

JAKE

(Wakes up, pops his head up, and rushes to his computer)
Did I get in? Did I get in? UGH nothing’s here.

JAKE

(In a sarcastic tone)
I’m not worried.

(JAKE walks to the side of his room, leans down, and puts his books in his backpack)
(LIAM’S MOM walks into his room)

LIAM’S MOM
Honey? Wake up.

LIAM

(Groggy)
What? What happened?

LIAM’S MOM
You were so focused on your application that you forgot how to live. Remember the concept of food? Brushing your teeth? Sleeping in your bed?

(Emphasis on bed)

LIAM

(Rolls his eyes)
Well, I had to give it everything I’ve got!

LIAM’S MOM

(Laughs and kisses LIAM on the top of his head)
Alright, go ahead and get ready for school.
(Both JAKE and LIAM grab their backpacks and leave their side of the stage, blackout on both scenes)
(Lights come up on both rooms as JAKE and LIAM run into their respective rooms from their side of the stage, both toss their backpacks on the floor and head straight for their desks)

JAKE
Please be mail, please be mail, please be mail.
(Face shows excitement)

LIAM
Where is it? Where is it?
(Scrolls frantically on his computer)

JAKE
Mail!

LIAM
It’s not here! Why isn’t it here?!
(Continues searching)

JAKE
(Clicks on the message, starts reading the mail out loud quickly)
Thank you for your application to our school. We have reviewed your application…

(slowly reading, face falling)

JAKE
...but unfortunately we cannot accept Jake Davis at this time.

(JAKE starts crying, JAKE’S DAD walks in)

JAKE’S DAD
Oh no! What’s wrong buddy?

(JAKE points to the computer, JAKE’S DAD walks over and reads the email)

JAKE’S DAD
Oh son, I’m sorry. I know how much you wanted to go there.

JAKE
My life is over!
(JAKE puts his head down on his desk and JAKE’S DAD puts his hand on JAKE’s back)

LIAM

(Yelling)
Mom!

(LIAM’S MOM comes in, looking through a pile of paper mail)

LIAM’S MOM

Yes, dear?

LIAM

Why hasn’t my email come about if I was accepted yet? I thought it would be faster!

LIAM’S MOM

Oh, you mean this?

(hands LIAM a paper letter)

LIAM

Oh my gosh, what?! I thought it was coming by email! I’ve been looking all day!

(LIAM rips apart the envelope while his mother is talking)

LIAM’S MOM

Sorry, honey, the mail came this morning, I didn’t have a chance to look through it until now. Different colleges send news in different ways, there’s no way you would have known.

LIAM

Mom! I got in! I got in!

LIAM’S MOM

Oh my gosh, that’s amazing sweetie! I’m so proud of you!

(LIAM jumps up and hugs LIAM’S MOM, LIAM starts walking out of his room together with LIAM’S MOM’s arm around him)

LIAM

I’m so excited, I don’t know what to do with myself!
(They exit)

JAKE

(Stands up as he is talking)
This is terrible, I don’t know what I’m going to do!

(JAKE’S DAD puts his arm around JAKE and they walk out of his room, blackout on both scenes)
(Lights come up on both scenes. In LIAM’s room, he is packing clothes in a suitcase, sitting on his bed, and LIAM’S MOM is standing near him with a piece of paper in her hand. JAKE is laying face down on his bed, a suitcase is standing up on the floor)

LIAM’S MOM

T-shirts?

LIAM

Check!

LIAM’S MOM

Shorts?

LIAM

Check!

LIAM’S MOM

Toothbrush and toothpaste?

(Emphasis on and)

LIAM

Check! Check!

LIAM’S MOM

Underwear?

LIAM

Yes, mom.
LIAM’S MOM
Just making sure. Alright, I think you’re all set! I can’t believe my baby boy’s heading off to college!

(Goes over to LIAM and gives him a hug)

 LIAM
Moom!

LIAM’S MOM
Okay, okay. I’ll go start the car and you bring your stuff downstairs so we can get ready to leave.

(LIAM’S MOM walks out of the room, LIAM continues packing his suitcase)

JAKE’S DAD
(Walking in as he’s talking)
Come on, son, we have to get you ready to go. We’re going to be late for orientation.

JAKE

JAKE’S DAD
(sarcastically)
You’re right, the world is ending!

LIAM
(yells and throws his arms up)
The world is my oyster!

(zips up his suitcase and skips out of his room)

JAKE
(rolls over in his bed and stares at JAKE’S DAD)

JAKE’S DAD
(smirks)
Tough crowd.

JAKE
Whatever. Let’s just go.

(JAKE grabs his suitcase and stomps out of his room, JAKE’S DAD sighs and follows him, blackout on both rooms)
(In a dorm room with LIAM pacing around excitedly and LIAM’S MOM standing by the door on the inside, located on the half of the stage where LIAM’s room was)

(JAKE’s side of the stage is cleared out, lights go up on both sides of the stage)

LIAM
Mom, I’m so excited! I can’t wait for all my classes! Bio and Calculus and History and English and Spanish…

LIAM’S MOM
(Starts laughing)
Liam, Liam, slow down! It’s your first day! You still have orientation and we have to unpack all of your things and meet your roommate before you can get on to all of those classes.

LIAM
I know, I’m just so siked! We can unpack, but can we do it quickly so I can go exploring?

LIAM’S MOM
(Laughs again)
Ok, sweetie. Let’s get to it then!

(JAKE is walking onto his side of the stage, dragging a suitcase, with JAKE’S DAD walking next to him)

JAKE
What am I even gonna take here? History, French? I wanted to study astronomy so I could...

JAKE’S DAD
(Cutting JAKE off, they both stop walking)
I know you had this big plan about what to focus on and when but you just have to focus on what you’ve got right now… and what you’ve got is this great school right here. Whether you see it like that or not, it will give you as many opportunities as that dream school you wanted to go to. Forget about them, it’s their loss!

JAKE
No, Dad. It’s my loss. This is all my loss. I lost, it’s over, I’m done.

JAKE’S DAD
Well, I tried. There’s no convincing you. Just try not to bum your roommate out like that. Would you try that for me?
(JAKE rolls his eyes and they keep walking toward the center of the stage. They stop when they reach the center.)

JAKE’S DAD
I guess we’re here! Maybe it’ll all be fine.

JAKE
(sighs)
Maybe.
(JAKE motions as though he’s knocking on a door)

LIAM
Coming!
(door opening sound plays, the two boys meet in the center of the stage)

LIAM
Hey, roomie! I’m Liam Patterson!

JAKE
Jake Davis.

(They shake hands, JAKE and JAKE’S DAD cross over onto LIAM’s side of the stage and set his stuff down in the room)

LIAM
I was just about to go exploring campus! Wanna come?

JAKE
Sure, I guess.

LIAM
We can go to science labs and the dining hall and the basketball courts and we can visit the French professors and the Astronomy professors and the library…

JAKE
Wait, what did you just say?
LIAM

(slowly speaks, questioning)
The library…

JAKE
No, before that. They have an astronomy program here?

LIAM
Heck yeah they do! This is the greatest school ever! Come on, let’s go!

(Grabs JAKE’s arm and starts running out of the room with him)

JAKE
(Turning back to JAKE’S DAD, smiling)
Maybe this won’t be so bad after all.

JAKE’S DAD
(Smiles and laughs while talking)
Maybe.

(JAKE and LIAM run off stage left. JAKE’S DAD and LIAM’S MOM smile at each other and laugh. Light’s fade out.)