

THE FERAL CHILD

**By
Rand Higbee**

THE FERAL CHILD

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THE FERAL CHILD

*The Feral Child is dedicated to
the memory of a black cat named Isaac.*

THE FERAL CHILD

The Feral Child was originally produced by Anchorage Community Theatre (Anchorage, Alaska) in March/April of 2019. The production was directed by Carl Bright. The stage manager was Katie Bringold. The cast was as follows:

James – R. Scott Cantrell

Edith - MaryAlice Larmi

Irene - Denise Cotten

Mary (Act One) - Lulu Hedman

Mary (Act Two) - Jordan Jones

Victor - Spencer LeFebvre

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CAST OF CHARACTERS:

James Hauser.....In his early 40s, a child psychologist

Edith Butler.....In her mid-30s, foster mother to Mary

Irene Hauser.....In her early 40s, married to James

Mary Kittinger.....13, becomes a patient of James

Victor Cargol.....20, an aspiring psychologist

(Notes: Ages given are for the character's first appearance. If desired, separate actresses can play Mary in Act One and Mary in Act Two.)

TIME AND LOCALE:

The play takes place in the home of James and Irene Hauser. Visible is the living room/dining room area. A sofa with a coffee table in front of it and a dinner table with chairs is present. There is also a bookcase full of many, many books. Also visible is the door to outside, the kitchen door and a hallway which leads to the bedrooms. A good-sized window with a sill one can sit in is also visible.

Act One takes place in the summer and fall of 1972. Act Two takes place four years later.

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ACT ONE

A lone spot rises to find JAMES down center. He is facing the audience.

JAMES. “Before his encounter with others, man is nothing. To acquire his substance, he requires a milieu: The presence of others.” *(A beat.)*

Prologue. In August of 1962, while traveling through India, Thomas Kittinger, his wife Catherine and their three-year-old daughter Mary all disappeared. In March of 1972, Mary reappeared. This is the story of...

Me: Dr. James Hauser. This is the story of how I saved the girl. *(The lights rise to reveal the entire set. EDITH is just entering through the front door. IRENE enters and she and James stand together to greet Edith.)*

EDITH. I am so honored to meet you, Dr. Hauser.

JAMES. Of course you are.

EDITH. And such a lovely drive! *(Takes a deep breath.)* Just smell that country air!

JAMES. I assume you found the place without any trouble?

EDITH. Does a cow moo? *(She laughs.)*

IRENE. How long of a drive was it?

EDITH. First tell me if a cow moos or not.

IRENE. *(Considers a moment.)* Yes it does.

EDITH. Let me think now. I listened to the entire “American Pie” album and it just started over so...just about 40 minutes. *(A beat.)* I just got an 8-track tape player.

IRENE. Oh. The wave of the future.

EDITH. Yes. Even better, I get to meet Dr. and Mrs. Hauser! And you’ve agreed to take in Mary for the weekend! How wonderful!

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JAMES. And speaking of Mary...?

EDITH. She's out waiting in her taxi. I thought you and I should have a bit of a chat before I brought her in.

IRENE. Can I get you anything, Dr. Butler? Coffee? Tea?

EDITH. Oh, please. Don't trouble yourself. *(A beat.)* On second thought, how about a tuna fish sandwich?

IRENE. Oh. Certainly.

EDITH. I've developed a bit of a taste recently.

IRENE. Right away. *(Irene exits to the kitchen. Edith begins to look over the bookcase.)*

EDITH. Have you read all these books? *(She laughs at her own joke.)*
Don't you hate it when people ask you that?

JAMES. I do.

EDITH. But seriously. Have you? Read all these books?

JAMES. All except the ones I wrote myself. I find them a little dry.
(Edith laughs as if the joke were much funnier than it actually is.)

EDITH. Very funny. Can I borrow that line someday? If I ever write a book?

JAMES. Of course.

EDITH. We psychologists need to stick together, don't we?

JAMES. Dr. Butler, I've read your report on the girl.

EDITH. Have you? I am so honored.

JAMES. It's rather vague. Wouldn't you agree?

EDITH. Yes. No. I really couldn't say.

JAMES. I know virtually nothing about this Mary. Is she deaf? Is she dumb?

EDITH. Oh, we don't like to use the word "dumb," Dr. Hauser. We prefer to say "stupid."

JAMES. Dr. Butler. If I am going to evaluate the girl, I need to know something about her. I need a place to start.

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EDITH. Yes, I see your point. Why don't we start at the beginning?

JAMES. Why don't we?

EDITH. Because I don't know the beginning.

JAMES. What do you know?

EDITH. Mary and her parents disappeared. 10 years ago.

JAMES. That much I do know. In India.

EDITH. Yes. Authorities searched for several months, but finally had to close the case.

JAMES. Assumed deceased?

EDITH. Assumed devoured, actually. They were staying right by the Pench Jungle. After all these years it was quite a shock when Mary was found alive. Fortunately, she had been well cared for.

JAMES. By whom?

EDITH. You see, Dr. Hauser, we now arrive at the crux of the matter.
(Irene re-enters carrying a tuna fish sandwich on a plate. She gives the plate to Edith.)

IRENE. I heard a joke about tuna fish. You can tune a piano, but you can't tuna fish. *(Both Irene and Edith laugh.)*

EDITH. Your wife is quite the card, isn't she Dr. Hauser?

JAMES. A laugh a minute.

EDITH. Do you like tuna, Mrs. Hauser?

IRENE. Does a goose honk? *(Irene and Edith laugh.)*

EDITH. I like all kinds of fish. What's your favorite? Salmon? Tilapia?

JAMES. Dr. Butler! Who took care of Mary all these years?

EDITH. I suppose I should tell you that, shouldn't I?

JAMES. I suppose you should! *(Irene wanders over to the front window and looks out.)*

EDITH. We don't precisely know the name of the family which took care of Mary...

JAMES. Yes?

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EDITH. But we do know...

JAMES. Yes?

IRENE. Dr. Butler, I thought you said Mary was in a taxi?

EDITH. She is.

IRENE. There's no taxi out there. I only see your car.

EDITH. Oh, you misunderstand me, my dear. She's not in a taxi taxi. She's in her pet taxi. (*A stunned moment of silence.*)

JAMES. You have her in a cage?

EDITH. A pet taxi.

JAMES. (*Shouts.*) Bring her in here! Immediately!

EDITH. She's perfectly fine. She has a little ball to play with.

JAMES. (*Shouts.*) Bring her in here immediately!

EDITH. (*Putting down her sandwich.*) Dr. Hauser. You don't seem to understand—

JAMES. Immediately! (*James pushes Edith to the front door and shoves her outside.*) I have never in all my days!

IRENE. (*Looking out the window.*) It is a rather large cage.

JAMES. It doesn't matter how large the cage is! You do not put another human being in a cage! That woman should be locked up!

IRENE. In a cage?

JAMES. In a cage! Exactly!

IRENE. (*Looking again out the window.*) They're coming in, James. Try not to shout.

JAMES. (*Shouts.*) I am not shouting!

MARY. We don't want to frighten Mary.

JAMES. (*A little softer.*) I am not shouting! (*Edith re-enters through the front door escorting Mary who is barefoot and on her hands and knees. Mary looks all around the room as she hides behind Edith.*)

EDITH. Now Mary, don't be frightened. This is— (*On all fours and moving like a cat, Mary suddenly bolts for the sofa and hides behind it.*)

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The others all stare in that direction for a moment.) I was afraid of that. What I didn't finish telling you, Dr. Hauser, is that the family who raised Mary was...a family of tigers. *(James, Irene and Edith move to where they can peer behind the sofa.)*

JAMES. Tigers?

EDITH. She thinks she's a cat.

IRENE. She thinks she's a cat?

EDITH. Does a pig go... *(Edith attempts to grunt like a pig. James and Irene stare at her a moment.)* Mary likes it when I grunt like a pig. *(Everyone turns their attention to the sofa and tries to spot Mary hiding behind it. Irene crosses closer to it.)*

IRENE. *(Softly.)* Come here little kitty. I won't hurt you.

JAMES. Precisely how have you been caring for the girl? Can she feed herself? Can she dress herself?

EDITH. First tell me if a pig goes... *(Edith again grunts like a pig.)*

JAMES. Dr. Butler! I do not find your antics amusing!

EDITH. Mary really likes that. I thought maybe she'd respond.

JAMES. No matter what psychological stress a child is under you do not lock them up in a cage. *(Pointing to the front door.)* Good evening, Dr. Butler.

EDITH. *(A beat.)* You want me to leave?

JAMES. Does a bullfrog croak?

EDITH. By the end of the weekend, Dr. Hauser, you will understand. Now, before I go, I need to give you a few of her things. *(Edith opens the front door and brings in a bag she has left just outside.)*

IRENE. *(To MARY.)* We won't hurt you little kitty.

EDITH. *(Taking out a toy mouse on a string.)* Now, here is Mr. Bouncy Mouse. She likes Mr. Bouncy Mouse. *(Taking out a litter box.)* And, of course, her litter box.

JAMES. We will not be using a litter box.

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EDITH. Oh, I think you'd better take the litter box.

JAMES. Dr. Butler. We will not be treating Mary as an animal. We will be treating her as a human being.

IRENE. *(Still trying to coax Mary out.)* Here kitty, kitty, kitty.

EDITH. I'll just leave the litter box by the front door.

JAMES. *(Shouts.)* Good evening, Dr. Butler! *(Edith quickly exits out the front door. James crosses to Irene where they can both peer behind the sofa and yet keep a respectful distance. They look towards Mary for a long moment. Suddenly, Edith re-enters.)*

EDITH. Forgot my sandwich. It really is a very good sandwich. *(She picks up her tuna fish sandwich.)* Monday. 9 AM sharp. I'll be here. *(Edith exits out the front door again. James and Irene peer at Mary for a moment more.)*

JAMES. Irene. Go get me a bowl of milk.

IRENE. All right. *(A beat.)* I am making coffee if you'd rather have that.

JAMES. Not for me. For the girl. To draw her out.

IRENE. Oh. *(A beat.)* I don't think we should do that.

JAMES. Why not?

IRENE. Kitties get upset stomachs when they drink cow's milk.

JAMES. Very true. One small point. She is not a cat.

IRENE. She thinks she's a cat.

JAMES. Irene. The milk. *(Irene shrugs, then crosses to the front door and picks up the bag of supplies that Edith has left.)* What are you doing?

IRENE. If you're going to upset her tummy, I'm going to fix her kitty box. *(Irene exits to the kitchen. James crosses down center to face the audience.)*

JAMES. Chapter One: My initial object with Mary was to attach her to a social life. In order to accomplish this goal I first needed to do one thing. I needed to get her out from behind the sofa. *(James returns to where he was before as Irene re-enters with the bowl of milk. She places it where*

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Mary can get to it but will have to come out from behind the sofa. They watch for a moment.)

JAMES. I don't think she'll come out with us watching. Let's go to the kitchen and peek through the door. *(James and Irene start to exit to the kitchen.)*

IRENE. Yes. We'll go to the kitchen now. We're not pretending. We're really going to the kitchen. *(James and Irene exit. A few moments later Mary sticks her nose out from behind the sofa. She waits a bit, then slowly crawls out. She crawls up to the bowl of milk and begins to lap at it. She is cautious at first, but then starts lapping up the milk enthusiastically. James sneaks out from the kitchen and manages to place himself between Mary and the sofa. Mary suddenly notices James. She jumps and then, still on all fours, begins to dart about the room. James chases her, but she manages to slip by him and get back behind the sofa. Irene re-enters.)*

IRENE. She hasn't come out yet?

JAMES. Let's move the sofa.

IRENE. Move...?

JAMES. ...the sofa. Yes. If we move it out from the wall a little bit she won't be able to hide behind it.

IRENE. She feels safe behind there. It's important for a new pet—

JAMES. She is not a pet. She is a human being.

IRENE. All the same, I'm not so sure this is a good idea.

JAMES. Come on. *(James grabs one end of the sofa and waits for Irene to grab the other end. After hesitating a moment, she finally does so.)*

IRENE. I think this is a mistake.

JAMES. Objection noted. *(James and Irene move the sofa a few feet away from the wall. Mary panics and, on all fours, runs into the kitchen. Loud crashes are heard coming from the kitchen as James and Irene stare off in that direction for several moments.)*

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JAMES. Put the sofa back.

IRENE. Do what?

JAMES. Put the sofa back.

IRENE. Put the...?

JAMES. Put the sofa back! (*James and Irene move the sofa back to where it was before. Moments later Mary, still on all fours, runs back out of the kitchen and back behind the sofa. There is a long moment of silence.*)

JAMES. That concludes the evaluations for today. We will begin again in the morning. (*Irene exits as James faces the audience again.*) Saturday was a day spent in its entirety attempting to accomplish goal one:

Bringing Mary out from behind the sofa. (*James picks up Mr. Bouncy Mouse and crosses to the sofa. He dangles the toy mouse in an attempt to bring Mary out.*) Here's Mr. Bouncy Mouse. Come get Mr. Bouncy Mouse. Here's Mr. Bouncy Mouse. Come get Mr. Bouncy Mouse. (*Mary sticks her head out to look at the toy mouse.*) That's right. Come get Mr. Bouncy Mouse. Here's Mr. Bouncy Mouse. Come get Mr. Bouncy Mouse. (*Mary comes part way out from behind the sofa to paw at the toy mouse. James reaches down towards her and she scampers back behind the sofa. James begins to dangle the toy mouse again.*)

Here's Mr. Bouncy Mouse. Come get Mr. Bouncy Mouse. Here's Mr. Bouncy Mouse. Come get Mr. Bouncy Mouse. (*Mary again comes part way out to paw at the toy mouse, again James reaches for her and again she scampers back behind the sofa. James begins to dangle the toy mouse again.*) Here's Mr. Bouncy Mouse. Come get Mr. Bouncy Mouse. Here's Mr. Bouncy Mouse. Come get Mr. Bouncy Mouse. (*James crosses back down to the audience. The lights fade except for one spot which rises upon him.*) To no avail. Shakespeare wrote "Go wisely and go slowly. Those who rush stumble and fall." And yet I only had until Monday morning to complete my analysis of the girl. The situation did not seem

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encouraging. Then...Sunday morning... (*James exits down the hallway. The lights come back up full to reveal Irene sitting on the sofa with Mary sitting on her lap. Irene is petting Mary as she would a cat.*)

IRENE. Who's a pretty little kitty? You're a pretty little kitty. Who's a pretty little kitty? You're a pretty little kitty. (*Mary beams at the attention. James enters from the hallway and is startled by what he sees. Mary is startled as well. She jumps up and then dives back behind the sofa in a panic.*) What did— (*Turning to James.*) You frightened her!

JAMES. How did you do that?

IRENE. (*Holding up a hand.*) Fix my nails?

JAMES. How did you get Mary out from behind the sofa?

IRENE. She's really quite friendly if you aren't yelling.

JAMES. I haven't been yelling!

IRENE. You're doing it right now.

JAMES. I'm not--! (*He makes an effort to speak very softly and calmly.*) I tried all day yesterday to get her out with Mr. Bouncy Mouse.

IRENE. And you were yelling.

JAMES. I beg to disagree.

IRENE. Go into the kitchen a moment. Maybe I can get her to come back out. (*James thinks about this for a moment, then reluctantly exits to the kitchen. Irene softly calls out to Mary.*) Here little kitty. Here little kitty. The scary man is gone. Come here. Come here. (*Mary sticks her head out from behind the sofa.*) That's it. Come on up here beside me. The scary man left. Come on. I won't hurt you. I like little kitties. Come on. (*Mary cautiously creeps out and crawls up beside Irene who begins to pet her.*) That's a good kitty. Oh, you're such a pretty kitty. Such a pretty kitty. Say, do you know why the little kitty crossed the road? Because she was chasing the chicken! (*Mary smiles brightly and snuggles closer to Irene. James sticks his head out the kitchen door. Irene turns to James.*) See? She understands me. She thought that was funny.

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JAMES. (*Softly.*) She's just responding to the tone of your voice. Keep going.

IRENE. (*To Mary.*) What does a kitty need to get to the top of Mount Everest? She needs sure paws! (*Mary smiles brightly again.*)

JAMES. She doesn't understand you, but if she was three years old when she disappeared she must have some memory of language left. We need to re-ignite that.

IRENE. She's purring.

JAMES. (*Slowly coming out of the kitchen.*) She can't be purring. Human beings lack the physical— (*He listens a moment.*) By God, she is purring.

IRENE. When I came out this morning she was sitting by the window looking outside. I thought she'd run and hide again, but instead when I sat on the sofa she came and sat down beside me. Probably because I wasn't yelling at her.

JAMES. She likes your voice. (*Mary suddenly snaps her head over to look at James. She stares at him and then hisses.*)

IRENE. It's okay. The scary man won't hurt you.

JAMES. I see now the flaw in my methods. Cats prefer soft, feminine voices over harsh, male tones.

IRENE. Except she's not a cat.

JAMES. Irene, do you remember that Truffaut movie we saw about a year ago? "The Wild Child?"

IRENE. Was that the movie we had to read?

JAMES. (*Thinks a moment.*) It was subtitled, yes. Dr. Jean Itard took in a wild, abandoned boy much like Mary and attempted to educate him. In so doing he created the modern field of special education.

IRENE. When was this?

JAMES. Early 1800s.

IRENE. I don't see how that can help us. Dr. Itard is probably long dead by now.

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JAMES. Don't you see what I'm saying? Mary could turn me into the next Jean Itard. My work with her could make me world famous.

IRENE. You are world famous.

JAMES. Hardly. I've written a total of seven books and they've been read by a total of seven people. If I can work with Mary and if I can keep a journal of my experiences...

IRENE. You have to give her back to Dr. Butler tomorrow morning.

JAMES. I am aware of the approaching deadline. (*Giving Irene smiles, Mary hops down and scampers behind the sofa.*)

IRENE. Where are you going, kitty?

JAMES. She's getting something behind the sofa.

IRENE. Are you getting me a present? (*Mary scampers back out from behind the sofa carrying a mouse in her mouth. She climbs back up to Irene and drops the mouse into her lap.*) Oh, are you giving me Mr. Bouncy Mouse?

JAMES. Mr. Bouncy Mouse is in our bedroom.

IRENE. Oh. Then this is a real— (*Irene lets out a shriek and runs down the hallway. A startled Mary dives back behind the sofa.*)

JAMES. Well. That set us back a few days. (*James steps downstage and again faces the audience.*) Chapter Two: By Monday morning a decision had been made. A decision that would change Mary's life forever. (*Irene and Edith re-enter. Irene stands beside James. She seems to be hiding something behind her back. Edith has just re-entered through the front door. Throughout the scene Mary is occasionally seen peeking out from behind the sofa.*)

JAMES. I trust you enjoyed the drive out here, Dr. Butler?

EDITH. Does a... (*A beat. She thinks the better of what she was about to say.*) I did.

JAMES. Listening to Alice Cooper, perhaps, on your 8-track tape player?

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EDITH. Donny Osmond, actually. Dr. Hauser, I hope the small misunderstanding between us the other night—

JAMES. Think nothing more of it, Dr. Butler. Having spent a couple days with Mary, I understand the situation much better than I did before.

EDITH. I'm so glad. Did you complete your evaluation of her?

JAMES. I did not.

EDITH. Oh. Well. Perhaps we could try to schedule another weekend—

JAMES. That will not be necessary.

EDITH. I don't understand.

JAMES. Mary will be staying here. With us. *(A beat. Edith laughs.)*

EDITH. Dr. Hauser— *(James takes out some papers and shows them to Edith.)*

JAMES. Last night Judge Wentworth... Oh, you know Judge Wentworth? I have been asked to testify as an expert witness in his courtroom many, many times. Last night Judge Wentworth granted my wife and me full custody of the child. *(A moment of stunned silence.)*

EDITH. You can't do this!

JAMES. I believe I have already done so. Something about the previous guardian keeping the child locked up in a cage.

EDITH. You know that's not true! Not completely true!

JAMES. Of course, custody is only temporary right now, but that will soon change. I am the best-known child psychologist in the state. And do you know what a bit of research revealed, Dr. Butler? You are not a psychologist at all.

EDITH. I am!

JAMES. You are a veterinarian.

EDITH. Well? A veterinarian must practice animal psychology! Just ask... James Herriot! Or... Dr. Doolittle! Or...or...

IRENE. Mr. Ed?

EDITH. Yes. Or Frances the Talking Mule.

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JAMES. Good morning, Dr. Butler.

EDITH. I'll appeal!

JAMES. You may try.

EDITH. I'll appeal Judge Wentworth right off that bench!

JAMES. Good morning, Dr. Butler. I trust you can find the door yourself. *(Mary is sticking her head out from behind the sofa. Edith kneels down and calls out to her.)*

EDITH. Mary? Mary? Don't you want to come home with Mommy? *(Mary disappears back behind the sofa.)*

JAMES. I believe you have your answer.

EDITH. *(Standing back up she glares at James.)* You have not heard the last of this, Dr. Hauser!

JAMES. Oh, I so look forward to further exchanges. *(Irene takes out what she had hidden behind her back. It is a sack lunch.)*

IRENE. Dr. Butler, would you like another tuna fish sandwich?

EDITH. No I would not like another tuna fish sandwich! *(She turns and stomps toward the front door, but then stops and turns back.)* Actually, I would. That was a very good sandwich you made the other day. *(Edith takes the sandwich and then stomps to the front door and exits, slamming the door behind her. Mary remains hiding behind the sofa while Irene exits. James crosses down to address the audience.)*

JAMES. And so, now unencumbered by Dr. Butler, Mary's education continued. *(James exits. After a moment, Mary cautiously crawls out from behind the sofa. She crosses to the window and sits in it, gazing outside. Irene enters from the hallway. Mary and Irene's eyes meet and for a moment it seems as though Mary is about to run for the sofa, but instead she stays where she is and resumes gazing out the window. Irene slowly crosses to her.)*

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IRENE. Do you like the window, Mary? I have to start calling you “Mary” instead of “Kitty.” I hope you don’t mind. (*Irene is now beside Mary. The two both gaze out the window for a while longer. Mary then speaks, softly and rather inaudibly.*)

MARY. Mmmmmm. (*Irene looks at Mary in surprise.*)

IRENE. Did you say something?

MARY. Mmmmmm. (*Irene looks down the hallway and calls out softly.*)

IRENE. James. James come here.

MARY. Mmmmmm.

IRENE. James. Come here. Quickly. (*James slowly enters from the hallway.*)

JAMES. What’s the matter?

IRENE. I think she said her name.

JAMES. She what?

IRENE. She said “Mary.” I think she said “Mary.”

MARY. Mmmmmm. (*James very cautiously approaches Mary. She notices him briefly, but then goes back to staring out the window.*)

JAMES. Good morning, Mary. What are you looking at, Mary?

MARY. Mmmmmm.

IRENE. She said “Mary.”

JAMES. I don’t think that was “Mary.”

MARY. Mmmmmm.

IRENE. “Mommy!” She said “Mommy!” (*Petting Mary.*) Am I your Mommy?

MARY. Mmmmmm.

JAMES. That wasn’t “Mommy.” (*James and Irene kneel down by Mary waiting for her to “speak” again. Finally, she does.*)

MARY. Mmmmmm. (*A beat.*)

JAMES. She said “Meow.”

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IRENE. No. *(A beat.)* Maybe.

MARY. Mmmmmm.

JAMES. *(Standing back up.)* Definitely “Meow.”

IRENE. That’s still good. That’s still a word.

JAMES. It’s not a word.

IRENE. “Meow” is a word.

JAMES. No.

IRENE. Of course it is.

JAMES. A meow is a meow.

MARY. Mmmmmm.

IRENE. She’s speaking. Why are you trying to complicate this?

JAMES. Because a “meow” isn’t a word any more than “woof” is a word. Would you consider it speaking if she barked?

IRENE. I...would consider her to be bilingual. *(Irene exits to the kitchen as Mary again hides behind the sofa. James crosses towards the audience.)*

JAMES. Chapter Three: My initial goal of getting Mary to come out from behind the sofa was accomplished... *(He looks to where Mary is hiding.)*

...more or less. It was time to work more fully upon her social life. To paraphrase Shakespeare, I needed to bring her from a wild Mary to a Mary. *(The lights return to normal as Irene re-enters and Mary comes out from behind the sofa. Mary sits on the sofa as James holds her in place. Irene has a pair of shoes she is attempting to put on Mary’s feet. Mary struggles against them, but not very hard as she seems quite unaware of what is going on.)*

IRENE. If you’re the one who wants her to wear shoes you should try putting the shoes on her.

JAMES. She trusts you more than me.

IRENE. Because you yell.

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JAMES. She is more than capable of walking. We need to concentrate on that.

IRENE. Putting shoes on her feet isn't going to make her walk any more than...well...I can't think of an analogy right now, but any more than putting something else on her would make her do...something else.

JAMES. Wearing shoes will help her distinguish between her hands and her feet.

IRENE. Shoes are uncomfortable.

JAMES. For heaven's sake. Are your shoes uncomfortable?

IRENE. Have you ever worn heels?

JAMES. Well. Being human is uncomfortable sometimes. *(A moment of silence as Irene continues to attempt to get the shoes on Mary's feet.)*

IRENE. Any more than wearing boxing gloves would turn her into Muhammad Ali. That's what I should have said.

JAMES. A clever analogy. *(Irene finally gets the shoes on Mary's feet. James lets Mary go. Mary looks a bit confused, then slips off the sofa and onto the floor. She is on all fours. She tries to look at her feet for a long moment, then flips over on her back, lets out a loud, mournful cat wail and starts pawing at her feet.)*

JAMES. Excellent.

IRENE. Excellent? She's in pain!

JAMES. Not at all.

IRENE. Just listen to her! *(Mary continues her mournful cat wail.)*

JAMES. She'll get used to it. Now. A little grooming. Go get the nail clippers.

IRENE. No!

JAMES. "No" what?

IRENE. I will not let you declaw her! *(Irene exits to the kitchen as Mary hides again behind the sofa. James crosses downstage and addresses the audience.)*

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JAMES. Work continued daily upon Mary's social skills. To quote the poet Yaun Mei, "There is a difference between dining and eating. Dining is an art." (*Irene re-enters carrying plates and silverware. She crosses to the table and James joins her there. They begin to set the table for three people.*)

IRENE. (*Speaking softly so that Mary can't hear.*) Do you know who that was on the... (*Spelling it out.*) ...t, e, l, e, p, h—

JAMES. Why are you spelling?

IRENE. So the c, a, t doesn't hear.

JAMES. She's not a cat.

IRENE. Don't say it out loud!

JAMES. Who was on the phone?

IRENE. (*Spelling it out.*) D, R, Period, B, U, T, L

JAMES. For heaven's sake, Irene. Why do you keep talking to her?

IRENE. She keeps calling! It's not like there's some magical device on the phone that lets me know who's on the other end.

JAMES. When you realize it's her, hang up.

IRENE. She always pretends it's about something else. Today it was my recipe for tuna fish sandwiches. But the conversation always comes back to her regaining custody.

JAMES. As long as Judge Wentworth lives and breathes she hasn't a prayer.

IRENE. It's just so complicated.

JAMES. What is complicated?

IRENE. Mary. She's becoming more and more attached to us. And we to her. How does this end?

JAMES. (*Taking a seat at the table.*) It ends with me achieving my goals. (*Irene exits into the kitchen as James turns towards Mary.*) Mary, we will be eating dinner now. You will join us. (*Mary peeks out from the sofa.*)

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Mary, please join us at the table. (*Irene re-enters carrying three cups which she puts at the place settings.*)

IRENE. She doesn't understand you. (*Irene sits at the table.*)

JAMES. She understands me well enough. Mary, we will serve dinner when you take your seat.

IRENE. Come here, little kitty. I mean Mary. (*Mary suddenly crawls over to the table. She hops up onto her chair but then immediately hops onto the table. She stares at James.*)

JAMES. That's not correct, Mary. Sit in your chair. (*A beat. Mary just stares at him.*) Irene. Tell Mary to sit in the chair.

IRENE. Mary, in most cultures people sit in chairs rather than on the table. (*A beat.*) Did you know, however, that in Japan chairs are far less common than they are in Western culture? The—

JAMES. Mary. Sit in your chair. (*Mary knocks James' cup onto the floor. She watches it fall to the floor a moment, then stares at James again.*) No, Mary. We do not do that. (*James and Mary stare at each other for a long moment, then Mary knocks James' plate to the floor. James quickly stands.*) All right— (*Mary quickly scrambles off the table and back behind the sofa. James picks up his plate and cup and sets them back in place. He sits back down.*) Irene. You may now serve dinner.

IRENE. But Mary isn't—

JAMES. It will be Mary's choice whether she wishes to dine with us or not.

IRENE. Very well. (*Irene exits to the kitchen.*)

JAMES. If you wish to eat dinner, Mary, you will have to sit at the table. In your chair. (*Irene re-enters with a plateful of chicken. Immediately Mary sticks her head out from behind the sofa and begins to sniff.*) Irene, I must say. That chicken certainly smells delicious.

IRENE. It does smell good. (*Irene serves both James and herself a piece of chicken and then sits back down.*)

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JAMES. It doesn't just smell good. It smells delicious.

IRENE. Quite delicious.

JAMES. I certainly do like chicken. Especially when the chicken smells this delicious.

IRENE. It does have a very pleasing aroma.

JAMES. I love the smell of delicious chicken as it wafts about the room.

IRENE. Yes. There is a whole lot of wafting going on. (*James and Irene both begin to eat their chicken. Mary suddenly scampers over to the table. She begins to paw at James' piece of chicken.*)

JAMES. No, Mary. Sit in your chair. Mary. Sit in your chair. (*Mary attempts to get at James' piece of chicken. She moves this way and that way and, in short, makes a complete nuisance of herself. James does whatever he must to keep his piece of chicken from Mary. This chase scene goes on for quite some time. Finally, Irene takes a piece of chicken from the platter and puts it on Mary's plate.*)

IRENE. Look, Mary. Your own piece of chicken. You just need to sit in your own chair. (*Mary stops trying to get to James' piece of chicken and looks at the chicken on her own plate. She slowly crosses to and then sits in her own chair. She smells her own piece of chicken for a long moment. She then suddenly crosses back to James and resumes trying to get his piece of chicken again. James finally stands up and scolds her.*)

JAMES. No! No! Naughty girl! (*Mary scampers back behind the sofa. James resumes his seat. There is a moment of silence as James and Irene resume eating.*)

IRENE. I should take her some chicken.

JAMES. You will do nothing of the sort. She has a piece of chicken right there on her plate.

IRENE. But—

JAMES. When she sits at the table properly she may eat her piece of chicken.

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IRENE. I don't want her to starve.

JAMES. She is not going to starve. When she gets hungry she will eat.

IRENE. You may be a child psychologist, but I am a mother. Sort of. I can't stand the thought of her going to bed hungry. (*James is about to respond when Mary suddenly scampers out from behind the sofa, hurries over to James and grabs his piece of chicken. She then scampers back behind the sofa before James can react. There is a moment of silence.*)

IRENE. Problem solved. (*Irene exits. James crosses down to face the audience.*)

JAMES. Chapter Four: Confucius: "It does not matter how slowly you go as long as you do not stop." (*James exits. After a moment, Mary sticks her head out from behind the sofa and looks around to make sure no one else is around. She stands up and walks a few steps out from behind the sofa, then drops to all fours and crawls to the window. She sits in the window and stares outside. Presently, Irene enters. She watches Mary a moment, then crosses over to her.*)

IRENE. Good morning, Mary. (*Mary does not respond but continues to stare out the window.*) What are you looking at? (*No response.*) Can I get you something?

MARY. (*In a very catlike manner.*) Rrrrrrrrr.

IRENE. (*Considers a moment.*) I don't know what that is.

MARY. Rrrrrrrrr. (*They stare out the window together for a few moments, then James enters. He is dressing for work.*)

JAMES. Irene. Have you seen my blue necktie?

IRENE. Look behind the sofa.

JAMES. How about my watch?

IRENE. Look behind the sofa. (*James looks behind the sofa and retrieves his necktie and watch.*)

JAMES. We need to get her to stop doing that.

IRENE. And we need to get you to stop leaving your things all over.

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JAMES. Yes, very funny. (*James exits down the hallway.*)

MARY. Rrrrrrrrr.

IRENE. Honey, I would get you “rrrrrrrrr” if only I knew what “rrrrrrrrr” was.

MARY. Rrrrrrrrr. (*Mary lays her head on Irene’s shoulder.*)

IRENE. Oh, I love you too, Mary. (*James re-enters. He hasn’t put on his necktie but instead just has it looped about his neck. He carries a briefcase.*)

JAMES. Running a little bit late, so... You know the drill.

IRENE. Right. (*Trying to prevent Mary from seeing James at the door.*)

Mary? Why don’t we go get some breakfast? (*Mary sees through the attempt at distraction and quickly crawls over to the front door as James prepares to leave.*)

JAMES. No, Mary. Stay there.

IRENE. Come here, Mary. (*James attempts to open the door and slip away without letting Mary get out. This continues for several moments with James almost being able to get out, but not quite. He finally stops for a moment, tired from the effort.*)

JAMES. Could you come here and distract her?

IRENE. She wouldn’t go far.

JAMES. We don’t know how far she’d go.

IRENE. She’d stay right in the yard. She just wants to be outside.

JAMES. She doesn’t understand boundaries yet. She doesn’t understand “our yard” from the rest of the world. We can’t let her get lost.

IRENE. Where do you think she’d go?

JAMES. There’s no telling. Maybe she wants to go home.

IRENE. Dr. Butler?

JAMES. Of course not Dr. Butler. I mean home. Where she was raised.

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IRENE. India? *(To Mary.)* Mary, you wouldn't try to go to India, would you? It's a long ways. *(A beat.)* There's an ocean. *(A beat.)* You don't like water.

JAMES. Distract her. Please?

IRENE. Yes. *(Irene starts to jump around making funny faces.)* Look at me! Look at me! Woo, woo, woo! *(Mary turns to look at Irene. James quickly slips out the door. Mary quickly looks at the door, then turns back to Irene.)*

IRENE. Sorry. I think you'd learn that trick eventually.

JAMES. *(From outside the door.)* I should maybe see about building a fence for the yard.

IRENE. *(Calling out.)* Might be a good idea. *(A moment of silence as Irene and Mary both stare at the door.)*

MARY. Rrrrrrrr. *(Irene and Mary exit as James re-enters and faces the audience.)*

JAMES. Chapter Five: My most important task with Mary was to re-introduce her to the concept of language, for while other animals may communicate, it is our language that truly separates mankind from the beasts. My task was made somewhat easier than expected for Mary seemed to have retained some memory of language from before her disappearance. While she could not speak herself, she soon seemed to understand much of what was said to her. *(Mary, now on her two feet, re-enters and stands beside James. He turns to her.)* Mary. Go to the sofa and bring me the brown teddy bear. *(A beat. She looks blankly at him.)* Brown teddy bear. *(Walking awkwardly, Mary crosses to the sofa and retrieves a brown teddy bear which was behind it. She brings it to James and he pats her head.)* Well done. Mary, go to the kitchen and bring me the red ball. *(After thinking a moment, Mary exits to the kitchen. She quickly re-enters but instead of carrying a red ball she has a can of tuna fish. She hands it to James.)* What is this? *(No response.)* This is not the

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red ball. This is a can of tuna fish. (*Mary taps the can.*) No tuna fish. We just had lunch. (*Mary taps the can.*) No tuna fish. (*Mary hisses at James.*) Don't you hiss at me, young lady! (*Mary hisses at James again. Irene enters from the hallway.*)

IRENE. What's the fuss out here?

JAMES. Mary seems to have a slight problem distinguishing the red ball from a can of tuna fish.

IRENE. No she doesn't. (*James holds up the can of tuna fish as evidence.*) She knows the difference. But she also knows you can't eat a red ball. (*Mary takes the can of tuna fish from James and gives it to Irene. Mary taps the can again.*)

JAMES. No tuna fish. We just had lunch.

IRENE. Lunch was three hours ago.

JAMES. Mary. Go to the kitchen and bring me the red ball.

IRENE. Why don't you give her the reward she wants? Mary, if you go to the kitchen and bring us the red ball—

JAMES. Irene? Who is the child psychologist?

IRENE. (*A beat.*) You are.

JAMES. Exactly. (*Turning to Mary.*) Mary, if you go to the kitchen and bring us the red ball we will give you some tuna fish. (*Mary quickly exits to the kitchen. There is a moment of silence.*)

IRENE. I wish I'd thought of that.

JAMES. All right. Obviously you thought of it, but the way the message was delivered was all important.

IRENE. Of course. (*Mary re-enters with the red ball which she hands to James. There is something that looks like a short piece of string hanging out of Mary's mouth.*)

JAMES. Well done. (*He looks at her mouth.*) Mary, what do you have in your mouth? (*Mary covers up her mouth.*) Young lady, did you just eat a mouse? (*Mary shakes her head "no."*) Don't lie to me! The tail is still

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sticking out of your mouth! (*James makes a move as if to grab Mary, but Irene intercedes and puts an arm around her.*)

IRENE. Now, now. It's all right. If Mary was hungry and needed a little snack before dinner... (*Mary slurps the rest of the mouse tail into her mouth.*)

...oh, I do believe I'm going to be sick. (*Irene runs off stage to the kitchen as Mary exits down the hall. James crosses down to face the audience.*)

JAMES. Chapter six. Ludwig Wittgenstein. "The limits of my language are the limits of my soul." (*Mary re-enters and she and James sit at the table. Mary is barefoot. James has a candle which he sets on the table. He lights the candle as Irene re-enters. She carries a cup of coffee which she sets on the table for James.*)

IRENE. What's the candle for?

JAMES. Language lessons.

IRENE. Don't burn the house down.

JAMES. I am so glad you told me not to. That was exactly what I was intending to do. Burn the house down. (*Turning to Mary.*) Mary. (*Mary looks at James as Irene sits down to watch.*) Mary, observe. (*James leans in towards the candle. With each "Pa" sound he makes the candle flicker.*) Pa. Pa. Pa.

IRENE. Why can't it be "Ma?"

JAMES. We need the burst of air to make the candle flicker. Pa. Pa. Pa. Mary? Your turn. (*No response from Mary.*) Pa. Pa. Pa. (*Mary stares at the candle but makes no effort to speak. Irene and James both watch her for a moment.*)

IRENE. The rain in Spain falls mainly on the plain.

JAMES. Very funny.

IRENE. It was, wasn't it?

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JAMES. Pa. Pa. Pa. (*James looks at Mary and realizes that she is not wearing her shoes.*) Mary? Where are your shoes?

IRENE. (*A beat.*) In Spain! In Spain!

JAMES. Mary. Go get your shoes. (*A beat.*) Now! (*Mary reluctantly gets up and exits down the hall.*)

IRENE. James. I've been thinking.

JAMES. No good has ever come from a sentence that begins like that.

IRENE. I'm not sure we're doing the right thing.

JAMES. She must wear shoes.

IRENE. Not just the shoes. The whole thing. Every morning I find her sitting in the window, staring outside. Do we have the right to keep her like this? Really?

JAMES. Judge Wentworth gave us the right.

IRENE. But did he have the right? To give us the right? Does that make it right?

JAMES. Should we take her back to India? Is that what you think we should do? Let her run naked through the jungle?

IRENE. No. She should definitely wear clothes.

JAMES. Irene, at this very moment there are millions of school kids sitting in a classroom, wishing they were outside playing ball. Maybe we should get rid of the schools! Just let kids do what they wish!

IRENE. Quit being so logical. (*A beat.*) You're doing this to write a book.

JAMES. I am doing this to help Mary. Yes, I'm going to write a book. But first and foremost I am going to help Mary become a human being.

IRENE. What if she doesn't want to become a human being?

JAMES. Unfortunately, she already is one.

IRENE. Sometimes I wouldn't mind being a cat. No mortgages to worry about. No taxes. (*A beat.*) No Nielsen Ratings. (*Mary re-enters from the hallway. She is carrying her shoes. She shows them to James.*)

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JAMES. Put the shoes on, Mary. (*Mary thinks about this a moment, then puts the shoes on her hands.*) Mary, put the shoes on. (*Mary puts the shoes on her head and silently laughs at her joke.*) No! (*James gives Mary a swat on her rear. Mary glares at James a moment, then one by one throws the shoes at him. She exits, stomping off down the hallway and wailing a mournful cat cry.*)

IRENE. (*Picking up the shoes.*) I can't believe you just did that! You hit her!

JAMES. It was a swat on the rear.

IRENE. A swat is a hit!

JAMES. It didn't hurt her! It was a swat on the rear! It's like hitting a dog on the nose with a rolled-up newspaper!

IRENE. I wouldn't want you doing that to our dog! If we had a dog!

JAMES. And it was effective as well. Did you see her throw the shoes? She is now distinguishing her hands from her feet.

IRENE. That's all she is to you! An animal doing tricks!

JAMES. Don't be ridiculous.

IRENE. I don't want her to be an experiment anymore!

JAMES. Irene—

IRENE. I want her to be family! I want her to be happy!

JAMES. Happy? Who is happy? Do you wake up every day saying "Hello" to the bluebirds and singing "Oh, What a Beautiful Morning?"

IRENE. James, I'm serious about this.

JAMES. She's happy! She's happy! She has enough to eat. She has enough to drink. She has a nice, warm bed and she doesn't have to worry about being eaten by lions in the middle of the night. Yes, she's happy!

IRENE. How do you know?

JAMES. I have a diploma that says I know!

IRENE. You are impossible. (*Irene exits down the hallway. James starts to exit after her, but then turns as watches as Mary slowly re-enters.*)

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Mary sits down at the table again and stares at the candle for a long moment before quietly speaking.)

MARY. Pa.

JAMES. Again.

MARY. *(After a moment.)* Pa. *(James nods his approval. After a moment more, Mary exits as James stands up and faces the audience.)*

JAMES. Chapter seven. Without even realizing it, I was soon to reach the most crucial point in Mary's education. To quote Charles Dickens, "Love is in all things a most wonderful teacher." *(James exits. Mary re-enters and crosses to the window where she sits. She is now wearing her shoes. She gazes longingly out the window. Presently Irene enters from the kitchen.)*

IRENE. It's time for lunch, Mary. *(Mary pays no attention but continues to stare out the window. Irene crosses to her.)* What do you see out there? *(A beat.)* That's a fence. We're building a fence. When it's done in a few days we'll be able to let you play outside.

MARY. Rrrrrrrrr.

IRENE. I still don't know what that means, Mary.

MARY. Rrrrrrrrr. *(A moment of silence.)*

IRENE. No. That's not true. I think I do know what that means. Is it freedom? Do you miss your freedom? *(Mary crosses to the front door and stares at it.)* I can't let you out, Mary.

MARY. Rrrrrrrrr.

IRENE. You're my little girl and I'd do anything for you, but I can't do that.

MARY. Rrrrrrrrr. *(Irene slowly walks over to Mary and the front door. She studies Mary a long moment. Mary's full attention is on the front door.)*

IRENE. Would you come back? I could only let you out if you promised to come back. *(Mary doesn't reply but continues to stare at the front*

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door. Slowly Irene reaches to the door and then slowly opens it. Mary starts to exit out the door, then turns back. She takes her shoes off and tosses them to the floor. She then gives Irene a long hug.) Please say that you'll come back. (Suddenly Mary darts out the front door. Irene stares after her for a long moment.) Goodbye, Mary. (Irene closes the door and then crosses to the sofa where she sits, staring off into space. The lights change to indicate a passage of time, but Irene remains where she is. Presently James enters through the front door carrying his briefcase. He notices Mary's shoes on floor and picks them up.)

JAMES. Why isn't Mary wearing her shoes? *(Calls out.)* Mary? Mary, come out here this instant and put on your shoes! *(Looking to Irene.)* What are you doing?

IRENE. She's gone.

JAMES. What? Who's gone?

IRENE. Mary. *(She points at the front door.)* Gone.

JAMES. *(He rushes to the front door to look outside.)* What? How did that happen?

IRENE. I let her out.

JAMES. *(Slowly closing the door.)* You...what?

IRENE. She just sat there looking out the window. Remembering her freedom. *(James slowly crosses to the sofa and sits down, looking quite lost.)*

JAMES. You let her out? Deliberately?

IRENE. She promised to come back home.

JAMES. Irene! She doesn't even know what home is! Home is the jungle! Tigers!

IRENE. Maybe. Or maybe it's here. With us.

JAMES. There's no telling where she might go!

IRENE. She promised to come back.

JAMES. How did she do that? She can barely speak!

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IRENE. She promised with her eyes.

JAMES. We should call the police. (*Neither makes an attempt to get up. They sit staring off into space.*) How long?

IRENE. Four hours.

JAMES. Four hours? (*He sighs.*)

IRENE. You're very mad, aren't you?

JAMES. No. (*A beat.*) Yes.

IRENE. You'll never speak to me again, will you?

JAMES. Yes. (*A beat.*) No. (*They sit in silence for a long moment. Suddenly Mary jumps out from behind the sofa, scaring the wits out of both James and Irene.*)

MARY. Meow!

IRENE. How did you... How did you get there? That was impossible! (*Mary crawls over the sofa and sits down between Irene and James. She leans up against Irene for a long moment, then takes the shoes from James and puts them on her feet. She stares at James intently for a while, then slowly she moves from Irene and lays her head on James' shoulder.*)

JAMES. The lessons shall continue in the morning. (*The lights quickly fade to...Blackout.*)

END OF ACT ONE

**THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS—
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