

BIRD WATCHING

by

John P. Richards

BIRD WATCHING

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BIRD WATCHING

Playwrights' dedication

*To my inspiring wife, Juliene, and our exceptional children, David, Abigail, and
Laurel,*

*and to my dog and therapist, Macaroni,
all whose contributions to this work were invaluable.*

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CHARACTERS:

HANK EVERLY: 48, black male.

PLUM EVERLY: 17, black female. **KEVIN BILTMORE:** 17, white male.

MRS RUTH BILTMORE: 49, white female, privileged, preppy, mother.

LIBBY COOK: 77, white female, heavy set.

TOMMY TRAN: 52, Asian male.

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ACT ONE: "ANT BEHAVIOR"

Situated in a small courtyard at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (M.I.T.) is PLUM EVERLY, 17, and HER father, HANK EVERLY, 48. THEY both wait for a prospective student college tour to begin. PLUM is sitting under a tree reading a book.

HANK. What's that you are reading? (*PLUM shows the cover of the book to HANK*) Hmm. Did he ever reply?

PLUM. No. Course not. Shouldn't have emailed him. Professors don't respond to randos.

HANK. Well, you aren't random. And, he should have responded.

PLUM. You tell 'em, Dad.

HANK. Well, maybe you and three other people have read that book. He should be elated someone is interested.

PLUM. The red ants, big numbers but frail. Black ants, strong but in small numbers.

HANK. Hmm?

PLUM. Never changes.

HANK. Ok, well, let's focus here. Remember, ask a lot of questions. Good questions.

PLUM. Stop telling me that.

HANK. Look, THIS IS IMPORTANT!

PLUM. No, it's not.

HANK. This is M.I.T! Everything is important. You need to put your best foot forward in EVERY interaction. We've gone over this.

PLUM. I don't have a best foot. My feet are exactly the same. Both. Same and equal. I don't favor one over the other.

HANK. Thought this was your dream school. Don't you want to make a good impression?

PLUM. We'll have one nerd walking a bunch of other nerds around

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campus. That's all.

HANK. The tour guide had better walk backwards.

PLUM. Umm, I'm pretty sure he'll walk backwards. They all do.

HANK. No. The guy at Harvard. He walked straight ahead, his back to us! Pompous. Not cool. It says a lot. Backwards is not negotiable! Well...if you get in, I'll make an exception.

PLUM. I won't get into Harvard anyway.

HANK. It's gotta be face to face. Weaving through the sidewalks as if they have eyes in the back of their head while delivering a compelling spiel on the merits of the university. It speaks volumes.

PLUM. You speak volumes. And please stop.

HANK. You think this is just a tour. No, it's more, more, more. The admissions people ask these guys. They want to know who is articulate. They want to know who asked good questions. EVERYTHING is important.

PLUM. What about my SAT score? Is that important?

HANK. Of course.

PLUM. Is a perfect score good enough?

HANK. Well, no, you know I saw on Reddit that an applicant at USC had a perfect SAT and a perfect GPA. He didn't get in. Unbelievable. Competitive, I tell you.

PLUM. He probably didn't ask enough good questions.

HANK. Yeah. Maybe. Probably.

PLUM. The tour guides at USC were theater students.

HANK. Well, they were entertaining. Why don't you act like them? Super outgoing and chatty. They like to see that.

PLUM. No, don't think so.

HANK. Just one time. Then you can be yourself.

PLUM. That's so cringe.

HANK. Oh, no, you are NOT...cringe, please don't say that.

PLUM. I'm not. I meant you. You're cringe.

HANK. Funny.

PLUM. Not funny.

HANK. Plum, M.I.T. will be great. Best science program in the world! We just gotta get in.

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PLUM. We?

HANK. You, but we are too. A team. This is a team effort.

PLUM. I need air.

HANK. Why so grumpy? You know what a rotten Plum is?

PLUM. You've said that a million times. A prune. Prunes give you the shits.

HANK. Yes, they do!

PLUM. Can't believe you named me Plum. So lame and embarrassing.

HANK. Is that what this is all about?

PLUM. Well, yeah, obvi, Einstein, and everything else.

HANK. It's a cute name, your mother gave it to you.

PLUM. Cute? And, no, don't tell me again—

HANK. —we were up on a hill, just us, us ... and romance in the air, and maybe some grass pollen. A picnic on a sunny day. A meadow among the plum trees. And then came Plum nine months later. Hey, it could've been a crab apple.

PLUM. Ugh. Mom. Where are you?!

HANK. (*Long beat of silence, then in a shaky voice.*) She's right here. Mom is here with us. These trips, our times together, are special. Long after you graduate, you'll remember these trips with great affection.

PLUM. I wish for early onset.

HANK. Early what?

PLUM. Alzheimer's. Memories erased. What a gift!

HANK. (*A long beat of silence. Then...*) I'm wondering if those bell bottom jeans were a good choice.

PLUM. On you, or on me?

HANK. You look a little old fashioned?

PLUM. Jesus.

HANK. Yeah, maybe you should have worn those ripped up jeans. Isn't that cool now?

PLUM. It was going to be either sweats or bell bottom jeans. Maybe my perfect GPA can overcome my choice in trousers?

HANK. You are not taking this seriously. Do you know how much time I've spent with you on these applications? I mean, how many hours did we take writing those essays—

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PLUM. –months–

HANK. –months! And money, these college trips cost a lot of money!

PLUM. Dad, it's a vacation. I just wanted some clam chowdaaa from Bwaaaston. And a Bawston lager.

HANK. You wish you could drink.

PLUM. Yeah, I wish. A frothy lager, yes, I do prefer a strong double IPA, but a pint of Guinness just below room temp is sweetest. I'm 23, from Dull, Ohio. Fake ID.

HANK. *(Hank sees SOMEONE approaching, KEVIN BILTMORE, 17, and his MOTHER, MRS RUTH BILTMORE, 49, enter and walk toward PLUM and HANK.)* Here he comes. Plum! Posture!

MRS BILTMORE. Are you here for the tour?

HANK. Yes. We are. I'm Hank and this is Plum.

KEVIN. Plum?

MRS BILTMORE. I'm Ruth. Ruth Biltmore. This is Kevin.

HANK. Oh, thought you might be the tour guide.

MRS BILTMORE. Me. What? You kidding? Do I look like a student guide?

HANK. Oh, no, no not at all! Meant him.

MRS BILTMORE. I said that was Kevin.

HANK. Tense?

PLUM. Dad stop talking.

HANK. Anyway, where is the tour guide?

MRS BILTMORE. No idea.

HANK. Hey, Plum, let's practice that intro, eh. Practice on Kevin.

PLUM. No.

HANK. Plum. Come on.

MRS BILTMORE. Kevin, show Plum how it's done.

KEVIN. Please mom–

MRS BILTMORE. –Kevin.

KEVIN. Ugh. My name is Kevin, but everyone calls me Kev. I'm from Salem, Oregon.

HANK. No kidding, we're from Portland.

KEVIN. Oh, wow, really–

MRS BILTMORE. –Kevin! Please continue. Don't break character!

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PLUM. Don't break character? Seriously?

KEVIN. Ok. My name is Kevin. I attend Bishop School. I am an athlete scholar, varsity wrestling for three years. Soon to be valedictorian I--

PLUM. –Bishop. Figures.

MRS BILTMORE. Excuse me, allow me to add that Kevin is a legacy. I am a proud alumnus, 1984. Kevin wants to major in chemical engineering. It's a natural progression from his study abroad in London, Kings College, the summer session for gifted youth. He also has a passion for helping people, people in need. Much of his free time is spent with the less privileged. Is that appropriate to say? Well, I'll stop, I must be boring everyone. We are VERY excited to be here.

PLUM. That is stellar, Kev!

HANK. Your turn, Plum.

PLUM. My name is Plum; I hope to study Theater Arts.

PLUM. My friends call me Prune--

HANK. (*Hank looks at Plum in disbelief.*) –what are you doing?

PLUM. I'm introducing myself.

HANK. Wait. Plum, where are you from? And, by the way, she wants to study biology, she's pre- med.

PLUM. Well, sure, ok. I was born in Amsterdam, lived there for three years, then four years in Seattle, two years in Tokyo, six years in Jakarta, a year in Boise, Idaho. So, WHERE the hell am I from? I have no idea!

HANK. OH MY GOD, what are you doing?

PLUM. My jeans are Levi, piercings are Tiffany, shoes would be Gucci that look astonishingly like Converse, and my tank top is Prada. Make up by Kylie Jenner.

MRS BILTMORE. Oh, dear god.

PLUM. I am a less privileged version of Kevin. Obviously, I am not a legacy. Well, almost everybody gets rejected by M.I.T. so it's probably the last time I'll see any of you, except maybe for Kevin. Maybe he'll serve me a cup of chowdaaa in the soup kitchen after having dragged myself in from a drug infused and sleepless week of homelessness. I'll use my best foot to hold the plastic spoon cuz my pin-cushioned arms will have rotted off from the tourniquets I forgot to remove. Thank you, Kevin! Well, enough about me, let's see M.I.T!

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MRS BILTMORE. My god. We need strong parenting here.

HANK. (*Long beat, awkward moment.*) Where the hell is the tour guide. He's really late.

MRS BILTMORE. Kevin, I thought you said the tour met at the Biltmore Building

KEVIN. Ah, whaa, yeah, I thought.

HANK. That's what the email said. Plum, check that email.

PLUM. (*Plum checks her iPhone.*) Oops...update! Parent tour meeting point changed to the main courtyard.

HANK. What the...? Parent tour. What the hell is that? We're late.

MRS BILTMORE. (*Mrs. Biltmore screams.*) Ahhhh. We're late. Damn! Kevin, wait here!

HANK. Plum, ummm, well, wait here, too! (*Hank and Mrs Biltmore run off stage.*)

HANK. (*O.S.*) Plum, I'll be back.

PLUM. (*Plum looks at Kevin, neither move. Plum and Kevin are standing in front of the Biltmore Building.*) Hey, Kev, sorry about that. I'm losing my mind with these fucking tours. I kinda lost it.

KEVIN. Did you really live in all those places?

PLUM. Yeah, I did. But piercings aren't Tiffany. And these ARE Converse. I'm not sure who Prada is but sounded good. Just trying to get my dad to crack.

KEVIN. Your dad seems ok.

PLUM. No, he's an NPC. Your mom, SHE'S intense.

KEVIN. Yeah. Drone mom.

PLUM. Bummer. Run for cover.

KEVIN. Where's your mom?

PLUM. She died last year, of cancer. Throat cancer. She couldn't talk after surgery. She died alone. Charity Everly. Kinda hard to say, but I liked that name.

KEVIN. Ah, oh, sorry. Alone?

PLUM. Yeah. My dad took us on vacation. Camping, if you can believe it. I hate camping. She died...while we were camping.

KEVIN. Why did you go camping?

PLUM. Dad's friend, Tommy, took us. My dad said mom told him we

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should go, she'd be ok. She told my dad. Told. But she couldn't have. Tommy took us bird watching. Complete waste of time. On the way back, we got a call. Mom... I hate my dad...for doing that. She never said it. But I just keep it inside. Bubbling, boiling, actually.

KEVIN. Damn. Bird watching. Sounds horrible. Sorry.

PLUM. Dad said she told him to take me away, for a nice weekend, get me out of the house. She wrote him a note. Well, then where is the note? Where's the evidence? Dad wanted to get away, that's really why we went.

KEVIN. Why doesn't he just show you the note?

PLUM. What? I just told you. There was NO note! We just up and left!

KEVIN. Ohhhh, I see.

PLUM. Anyway, TMI. Don't really want to talk about it.

KEVIN. M.I.T., So, you gonna apply?

PLUM. Uh, I don't know. You?

KEVIN. Ah, yeah, got to. My parents are donors.

PLUM. Organ donors? Which ones?

KEVIN. Biltmore School of Engineering. Yeah, I'm a shoo-in, well, if it wasn't for English.

PLUM. What, you don't speak English. Whaaa they never told me they spoke English here.

KEVIN. English class. I need A's. All A's. The old lady is gonna give me a B.

PLUM. That sucks. Can't you do something. You got money. Pay her off.

KEVIN. Wish I could. She's old school. Doesn't take bribes. Evil, I tell you.

PLUM. Dang.

PLUM. (*Plum looks down. Fascinated.*) Reds.

KEVIN. Huh?

PLUM. Red ants. Lined up. Marching to who knows where. Reds, M.I.T. Typical.

KEVIN. Yeah. Pretty common.

PLUM. Yep, I'd expect it.

KEVIN. Yeah, ants are everywhere.

PLUM. Especially, red ants.

KEVIN. Guess the brainy ones are here.

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PLUM. Ants can teach us.

KEVIN. Ah, well, I dunno. Teach what?

PLUM. Red ants hate black ants. Blacks hate reds. Enemies. They eat cockroaches. They don't tolerate each other.

KEVIN. Didn't know that.

PLUM. Yeah. Senior high school experiment. Biology.

KEVIN. Yeah. What was it?

PLUM. Took a colony of red ants and a colony of black ants and a cockroach. Dropped them all into the middle of the ant farm.

KEVIN. That's cool.

PLUM. They killed each other, never ate the cockroach.

KEVIN. Oh, not cool.

PLUM. Cockroach lived.

KEVIN. Oh, yuk, those are nasty.

PLUM. Then! Did the same experiment but, this time, dropped in two cockroaches.

KEVIN. What happened?

PLUM. What do you think?

KEVIN. They killed each other?

PLUM. Duh...NO. The reds ate one cockroach, the blacks ate the other cockroach. Then they just wandered around. Harmony, I guess.

KEVIN. Damn. You are really into bugs and shit.

PLUM. You should be asking me why I killed two cockroaches.

KEVIN. Ah, what? Cuz they are creepy? Ok, why did you kill two cockroaches?

PLUM. Cuz they don't look like me? Cuz they are ugly? For science? You are a legacy...I'll give you that.

KEVIN. Dang. Ease up on me.

PLUM. Kind of ironic. Ants won't kill their own kind.

KEVIN. You just said they killed each other.

PLUM. I'm talking about their own kind! Red is one kind, black is another kind.

KEVIN. Oh, I get it. They kill the other kind.

PLUM. Dang, you can be taught.

KEVIN. Come on, easy.

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PLUM. Among their own kind, they are quite altruistic. They sacrifice for the good of the group. Pretty advanced civilization if you ask me.

KEVIN. Kinda like humans.

PLUM. No, not really. I haven't figured it all out. But I will, someday.

KEVIN. Well, let me know when you do!

PLUM. You guys are rich?

KEVIN. Uhhh, well, yeah, big business, my dad owns a big business. My mom runs it now.

PLUM. What kind of business?

KEVIN. Mmmm, pest control, Biltmore Pest Management. Grandpa started it a long time ago, Biltmore Extermination. We can't say extermination anymore, that's too violent. We even sprayed the state capital.

PLUM. No shit! Infestation there, I guess. Ok, so, you guys kill bugs and get paid for it? Assholes.

KEVIN. Hey, paid for that building. Bugs gotta be managed. Cockroaches, too.

PLUM. Managed. Like humans. First its bugs, then soon it'll be humans.

KEVIN. What the hell?

PLUM. Exterminator.

KEVIN. I'll take that as a compliment.

PLUM. Ugh, ant behavior.

KEVIN. Hey, what's that book you got.

PLUM. Yeah, this, it's Tales from the Ant World by E.O. Wilson. Ever read it?

KEVIN. Ants, damn, obsessive. No, can't say I've ever heard of it.

PLUM. Suppose you haven't. It's not about ants, it's about humans.

KEVIN. Well, ok, sorry. Hey, I think we missed the tour.

PLUM. Yeah. Seems like it. I'm not sure I need a tour. *(Plum and Kevin exit stage and back to join Hank and Mrs Biltmore waiting as the tour has departed.)*

MRS BILTMORE. Kevin, aren't you supposed to be on the tour?

KEVIN. Tour guide never showed.

MRS BILTMORE. Well, young man, let's go find out what happened.

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(MRS BILTMORE and KEVIN hurry off stage.)

HANK. Plum, what's got into you?

PLUM. Just thinking about ants.

HANK. What?

PLUM. Ants.

HANK. Ants?

PLUM. Ants. We have more in common with ants than you think. Dad, we share 33% of our DNA with ants.

HANK. That seems improbable.

HANK. Hey, is this attitude about mom?

PLUM. No, it's about you. Where were you?

HANK. We hurried over to the tour. Not a big deal. You caught up with us.

HANK. *(Long beat...)* I know it's been tough. Tough for you to understand.

PLUM. Me? Understand?

HANK. Let's talk about this later. We need to go catch a tour.

PLUM. Missed it, Dad. *(Lights on Plum. Hank is in shadow. Plum sits down and opens her book.)*

HANK. *(Lights up slowly.)* Did you say something? *(Plum looks at Hank, Blackout.)*

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ACT TWO: "HUMAN BEHAVIOR"

Lights up. An empty classroom except for LIBBY COOK, 77, who is seated at her desk doing administrative work. Kevin enters.

LIBBY. Hello, Kevin. *(Kevin doesn't respond.)* Can I help you with something? Pull up a chair.

KEVIN. I'll stand, thank you.

LIBBY. Oh, dear, please sit down. You're perspiring.

KEVIN. *(KEVIN sits down.)* I want to talk about my grade. On the test.

LIBBY. As I recall, you didn't do very well on that last test. I was surprised. You are such a strong student.

KEVIN. A B is not fair.

LIBBY. Well, Kevin, that's what you've earned. I'd be happy to review the test with you.

KEVIN. But that B on this test means I'm going to get a B in your class.

LIBBY. Well, I'd have to check into that, but, yes, that's possible. Now look, Kevin, as I recall, I wanted a strong summary of *In the Heart of the Sea*. We spent an entire semester on great literature. I believe you mentioned the whale was a gray whale. Well, he's not.

KEVIN. Whales are gray. Are you kidding me?

LIBBY. There are gray whales. Gray whales ARE gray. Killer whales kill. Blue whales are? Yes, blue! Humpback whales have a what? Yes, a humpback. And what kind of whale was explicitly described by Nathaniel Philbrick in his great work of literature?

KEVIN. Whale? I don't know.

LIBBY. Sperm, sperm, SPERM. A Sperm whale!

KEVIN. And sperm whales look like sperm? What's your point!

LIBBY. My point is Kevin; we have much to learn from whales. Have you seen a whale breach? Gathering speed and momentum as they fly from the water into the air? But, Kevin, they can't fly, so they flop back into the ocean where they belong. Maybe they want to be a bird, fly gloriously through the air. But they never will Kevin, they never will. A whale is a whale, a bird is a bird. Think about it Kevin, whale, or bird?

KEVIN. Are you saying I'm a whale?

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LIBBY. It was a B. Your grade, anyway you look at it.

KEVIN. I can't get a B.

LIBBY. Ok, look, don't take this so hard, Kevin. B is still a good grade.

KEVIN. You don't understand, I can't get a B.

LIBBY. I do understand. You are a high achiever. It's never easy to come up short. But it can happen and it's a good learning experience.

KEVIN. Stop, Mrs. Cook. Please change my grade. I need an A in your class.

LIBBY. Kevin, relax. And do not talk to me like that again.

KEVIN. Listen. Change my grade.

LIBBY. You should leave. Now.

KEVIN. I have a gun.

LIBBY. A gun? Please, Kevin. It's best you leave. You can't just demand something and expect people to just fix it.

LIBBY. *(Kevin pulls a handgun from his pocket and points it to the ceiling.)* Oh, dear. Kevin, you're scaring me. Please put that away and leave now or I'll call Security.

KEVIN. Give me an A and everything will be ok. If you don't–

LIBBY. –If I don't?

KEVIN. I'll shoot you.

LIBBY. Oh.

KEVIN. Yeah, oh. Change my grade.

LIBBY. Okay.

KEVIN. To an A.

LIBBY. No, I meant okay, shoot me.

KEVIN. What the, you think I'm kidding?

LIBBY. No, of course not. You're sitting in front of a loaded gun and mad about your grade. You look like someone that's ready to shoot.

KEVIN. Yeah, sweating like a pig. But I'm very serious.

LIBBY. Pigs don't really sweat, Kevin.

KEVIN. You like pigs?

LIBBY. Well, they are fine animals. To cool themselves they wallow in mud.

KEVIN. I will kill you. If I have to.

LIBBY. Yes, I know, thank you.

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KEVIN. I need an A. If I bring home a B, my mom goes ballistic. She'll beat the crap out of me. Nobody understands. I must get an A.

LIBBY. I'm sorry, that's awful, Kevin.

KEVIN. I've been beaten and abused my whole life. Only thing I have left is my brain. Being the smart guy. If I didn't have that, I'm not sure what my parents would do.

LIBBY. What about your father? What does he think?

KEVIN. Dad has ALS. He just sits in his wheelchair and watches. He can't move, can't talk.

LIBBY. I'm so sorry, Kevin. I didn't know you've been dealing with all this. I can get you help, from a counselor.

KEVIN. The only help I need from you is for you to change my grade. Just change my grade and all of this will be over.

LIBBY. I'm sorry. I won't change your grade.

KEVIN. I am serious, I will use this gun. I will definitely use this gun.

LIBBY. Thank you.

KEVIN. Aha, right, you don't want to die.

LIBBY. Well, I do want to die, desperately, I do.

KEVIN. Shut up. You're confusing me.

LIBBY. Shoot me, Kevin. Please.

KEVIN. Ok, then, where would you like to be shot? In the head, stomach, heart, where?

LIBBY. Let me think about it. Not my head, that's too messy and would never work with the open casket. If you hit me in the stomach, that might not kill me. These are the times I wish I taught science instead of English. I'd know the location of all the different organs.

KEVIN. You are crazy. Yeah, well, think it over. I can give you a minute or two.

LIBBY. Now if I choose the heart, I must tell you I have dextrocardia.

KEVIN. What the hell is that?

LIBBY. My heart is on the right side of my chest. Not the left. So, if you shoot me in the heart, shoot me on my right side.

KEVIN. I'm not joking around.

LIBBY. Neither am I, Kevin. It's a rare condition. It's like looking in the mirror.

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KEVIN. Wait. What?

LIBBY. Now, don't be confused. You can't mess this up. My heart is on my right side as I face you. As you face me, it's on your left.

KEVIN. Umm, this is confusing me.

LIBBY. *(Kevin points the gun at Libby. His hand is shaking violently.)*

Oh, to be dead. No cares, no worries, no bratty school kids. Peace.

KEVIN. You really do want to die?

LIBBY. I do.

KEVIN. Well, if you don't change my grade, I won't shoot you. So, just change it, then I'll shoot you.

LIBBY. Now this is making more sense.

KEVIN. Good, then.

LIBBY. But I can't change your grade. It wouldn't be fair to the other students.

KEVIN. Then I won't shoot you.

LIBBY. Oh, that would upset me.

KEVIN. Wait, hang on a second, that doesn't make sense. You are trying to trick me. *(Kevin, in frustration, begins to pace the room. Libby slowly gets up from her chair and starts walking toward the door.)* Sit down! I never said you could get up. Sit down or I will shoot you, somewhere, on your body or chest, the right, or left side, or, ugh, anyway, I will!

LIBBY. *(Libby walks back to her desk.)* Ok, ok, that's fine. I was only stretching a bit. These old legs get pretty stiff sitting behind that desk all day. I wish I could just be outdoors all day. Do you enjoy being outdoors, Kevin?

KEVIN. Ah, yes, I guess so.

LIBBY. Yes, you need to keep moving at my age. I love birds. Love to get outdoors, stroll through the forest, searching for our feathered friends. Otherwise, oh, I just stiffen up.

KEVIN. Yeah, they call that rigor mortis.

LIBBY. Yes, indeed. I'll never forget how Mr. Cook looked.

KEVIN. Mr. Cook?

LIBBY. Rigor mortis. Reminded me of dear Mr. Cook. It was a terrible sight. Dear Bernard, I still miss him. But he's in a better place.

KEVIN. Dead. Six feet under. That's a better place?

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LIBBY. Oh no! He's up in heaven. You could never meet a better man. He was kind to everyone, strangers, family, friends, it didn't matter. He loved people. I wish you could have met him.

KEVIN. Why?

LIBBY. Well, I think he might tell you that getting a B on an English test would be the very best thing that could ever happen to you.

KEVIN. There is nothing good about a B. Best thing is to have my mom kick the shit out of me. Right.

LIBBY. Well, Mr. Cook would just love you. And, you wouldn't know why. You wouldn't think you deserve to be loved, but he would love you, nonetheless. That's how he was.

KEVIN. Ok, well, he's not here. So, it's a moot point. *(He bangs his fist into the desk. She doesn't react.)*

LIBBY. It looks like you are becoming your mother.

KEVIN. No way.

LIBBY. Kevin, does your mother really beat you?

KEVIN. Yeah, she does. Beats me. Fist punching and all! And I fight back. I'm a damned good fighter when I'm pissed off.

LIBBY. Are you telling me the truth, Kevin? *(Kevin stops pacing and sits down. Long beat, then...)*

KEVIN. How did you know?

LIBBY. Oh, just a hunch. I know kids. This old lady has been teaching for 40 years now! All my working life. I've heard all the lies.

KEVIN. My mom is a pain. All she cares about is appearances. She's embarrassing. But she never hit me. She is always miserable. She takes care of Dad. But I do hate her. I wish I had a normal mom. I want straight A's cuz, well, I need a full scholarship to get the hell out of the house. If I don't get straight A's, I have no chance at M.I.T.

LIBBY. Oh, M.I.T. That's a good one.

KEVIN. And, no, we are not the Biltmore's of the Biltmore School of Engineering. That's my mom's fantasy.

LIBBY. You've got an Engineering School named after you!?

KEVIN. No, I just said it was a lie. No relation, no relation, whatsoever! I gotta get in on my own. That sucks.

LIBBY. And your father. There is no way he can help?

BIRD WATCHING

KEVIN. I'll show him my report card but he just kind of stares at it. Then stares at me. It's kinda creepy.

LIBBY. Do you ever talk to your father?

KEVIN. No, can't. ALS, I told you, it's no use. Seems you have a hard time understanding English!

LIBBY. Well, as I understand it, he might be able to hear you.

KEVIN. What the hell is the point if he can't talk back. It's like talking to a rock.

LIBBY. Have you ever apologized to your mom?

KEVIN. No. Why? What for?

LIBBY. For hating her.

KEVIN. She's a loser. I don't care.

LIBBY. I think you do care.

KEVIN. Shut up. I don't want to talk about my mom. Or my dad. I'm getting pretty pissed off. And don't forget I've got a loaded gun in my hand, and I will not hesitate to use it.

LIBBY. I know, Kevin.

KEVIN. And, who's the liar here? It's you. You really want to die? No, I don't think so. Now change my grade or I will for certain blow your head off because I can't figure out what side your heart is on!

LIBBY. But, Kevin, I'm not lying. I desperately want to die.

KEVIN. Then kill yourself, problem solved!

LIBBY. That's not possible.

KEVIN. Why not? Take the gun and blow your head off.

LIBBY. I wish it were that easy. You see, Kevin, I just want to be with Mr. Cook, in heaven. I go back home every day, for five years now, and I still miss him. The house is empty, except me. That's no way to live. Sometimes I want to walk in front of the school bus and just end it. But I can't.

KEVIN. Yes, you can. Just do it!

LIBBY. Suicide is a sin. When you sin, you go to hell. I know a lot of people down there and I don't want to live with them for eternity, no sir, I do not want that. But, when you pulled out that gun, I thought, hallelujah my prayers are answered!

BIRD WATCHING

KEVIN. Thought you loved to teach.

LIBBY. I did when I could share it with someone. With Mr. Cook.

KEVIN. What did Mr. Cook do?

LIBBY. He was a director. A Funeral Director.

KEVIN. Oh, that sucks.

LIBBY. He loved it. Behind every great funeral there is a great Funeral Director.

KEVIN. I didn't know that. I never thought of that.

LIBBY. You want to hear something, Kevin?

KEVIN. No, no I don't.

LIBBY. Well, let me tell you. Bernard and I planned to be cryogenically preserved. We both signed up. We saved, yes, it's expensive. We wanted to be frozen and reborn! To live, to be immortal, together. When Bernard died, he went straight to the freezer. You get wrapped up in a Ziplock. At least that's what it looks like. And, on ice, as long as it takes to find a cure, or a way to bring you back to life.

KEVIN. Yeah, so, is Bernard frozen in a fridge somewhere?

LIBBY. For a while he was. Then I got the call. Oh, I hate that day. So, terrible.

KEVIN. What?

LIBBY. He thawed out. Like a frozen turkey the day before Thanksgiving. Just thawed out. The refrigerator broke.

KEVIN. Whoops!

LIBBY. Yes, a tragedy.

KEVIN. You still getting frozen?

LIBBY. No, dear no. I canceled. Thankfully, a full refund less a recycling charge, for Bernard. I just decided to put all my eggs into the heaven basket. Darn well hope heaven is there. And Bernard is waiting. I must be on my best behavior till my time is up.

KEVIN. This is random. Grade, my grade?

LIBBY. I wish you were truthful with me, Kevin.

KEVIN. Huh? What, about not being rich?

LIBBY. Well, not just that.

KEVIN. What then?

LIBBY. About the gun. It's not loaded.

BIRD WATCHING

KEVIN. Huh, how did you know?

LIBBY. Intuition.

KEVIN. No, you just know I'm a dumb ass loser and too much of a coward to pull this off.

LIBBY. It's the weight.

KEVIN. What?

LIBBY. The weight of the gun. The way you hold it, and fiddle with it. I could tell there was no magazine in it. The barrel kept flopping over. The weight's all wrong for a loaded gun.

KEVIN. Jesus Christ, how do you know so much about guns?

LIBBY. Well, I just happen to have one of my own. *(Libby opens the top draw of her desk and pulls out a handgun.)*

KEVIN. Oh.

LIBBY. *(Libby lifts the gun and points it at Kevin. Then Kevin raises his gun and points at Libby.)* Kevin, this one is loaded. Doesn't flop forward. It's nice and balanced. Kevin, do you know what I do when someone threatens me with a gun?

KEVIN. Uhhh, wait.

LIBBY. You think you can come in here and order me around, trample all over me. Not today, KEVIN BILTMORE, not today.

KEVIN. Wait, Mrs. Cook. Mrs. Cook. *(A gunshot is heard. Both momentarily stand with gun pointed...Beat...Kevin drops to the floor.)*

LIBBY. Give my regards to dear Bernard. That is, if you make it there.

KEVIN. *(Lights out...Beat...Lights on Kevin. Kevin sits up.)* Was I shot? I didn't even feel it. It's sitting in my stomach, the bullet, as though I swallowed it. I must have swallowed it. I didn't taste it. Wait, bullets are made of lead. Is it healthy to eat lead? Stop the pressure. I'll go to the god damn school and be done with this sham. I'm just a dumb, stupid kid. Impostor, hoax, fake. A pretender. I only needed one favor. One small favor. No, instead, I'm shot. A slug in my belly. I'm a loser. Good for me. Good for me. Kevin, good for you. I'm dying. *(Blackout.)*

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