Samuel French Acting Edition

The Whale

by Samuel D. Hunter

SAMUEL FRENCH

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THE WHALE was first produced by the Denver Center Theatre Company at the Ricketson Theatre in Denver, Colorado on January 19, 2012. The play was directed by Hal Brooks, with sets by Jason Simms, costumes by Kevin Copenhaver, lighting by Seth Reiser, sound by William Burns, dramaturgy by Mead Hunter, and fight direction by Geoffrey Kent. The cast was as follows:

CHARLIE . . . . . Tom Alan Robbins
LIZ . . . . . Angela Reed
ELDER THOMAS . . . . . Cory Michael Smith
ELLIE . . . . . Nicole Rodenburg
MARY . . . . . Tasha Lawrence

THE WHALE was then produced by Playwrights Horizons at the Peter Jay Sharp Theater in New York City on October 12, 2012. The play was directed by Davis McCallum, with sets by Mimi Lien, costumes by Jessica Pabst, lighting by Jane Cox, sound by Fitz Patton, and dramaturgy by John M. Baker. The cast was as follows:

CHARLIE . . . . . Shuler Hensley
LIZ . . . . . Cassie Beck/Rebecca Henderson
ELDER THOMAS . . . . . Cory Michael Smith
ELLIE . . . . . .Reyna de Courcy
MARY . . . . . Tasha Lawrence

CHARACTERS

CHARLIE – early to mid forties, male, weighing around 600 lbs

LIZ – mid to late thirties, female

ELDER THOMAS – 19, male.

ELLIE – 17, female.

MARY – early to mid forties, female

SETTING

Northern Idaho.

The main room of a small, white-walled, desolate apartment in a cheaply constructed two story building. The room is dominated by a large couch that sags in the middle, re-enforced by several cinder blocks.

Within arm's reach of the couch are: a small computer desk on rollers with a laptop on top, a large pile of papers, a walker, a claw for reaching, and a whole universe of full, empty, and half empty food containers (donuts, candy bars, fried chicken, burgers, two liter soda bottles, etc.). Little effort has been made to clean up trash or organize.

A small kitchen is off to one corner of the stage, a bathroom and bedroom offstage.

TIME

The Present.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

The play is served much better by being performed without an intermission (running time is roughly 1 hour, 50 minutes). However, if absolutely necessary, an intermission can be taken in between Wednesday night and Thursday morning.

Dialogue written in *italics* is emphatic, slow, deliberate; dialogue written in ALL CAPS is impulsive, quick, explosive.

A "/" indicates an overlap in dialogue.

For John

MONDAY

Morning.

*(***CHARLIE***, a morbidly obese man in his early forties, dressed in oversized sweatpants and an oversized sweatshirt, sits on the couch in front of his laptop, speaking into a small microphone hooked up to his computer.)*

CHARLIE. This is from a paper I got from a student last year, a freshman at UC Santa Barbara. He was writing this for an American Lit class. It's a paper about *The Great Gatsby.*

(pulling out an essay)

"There were many aspects to the book *The Great Gatsby.* But I was bored by it because it was about people that I don't care about and they do things I don't understand. In conclusion, *The Great Gatsby* wasn't so great, LOL."

(stops reading)

The problems with this essay are painfully obvious. The student has no discernible thesis, almost no analysis whatsoever… I'll be posting the paper in it's entirety, what I want you to do is read through it a few times, and then post a three to four paragraph response providing concrete ideas for revision. Also, those of you who haven't given me paper four, I need it by five o'clock, *no exceptions.* And remember – the more revision you guys do on these papers, the better. The more you can change, chances are the stronger these papers will be. Alright?

Afternoon.

*(**CHARLIE**, in the same position before, in front of his computer, masturbating to gay porn.)*

(After a few moments, his breathing becomes more and more shallow. He pushes the computer desk away from him. He feels some sharp pain in his chest.)

(He reaches toward his cell phone, but accidentally knocks it onto the floor. The pain becomes worse. All the while, the gay porn is still playing in the background.)

*(**CHARLIE** takes some deep breaths, wheezing loudly, trying to calm himself down.)*

(a knock at the door)

CHARLIE. Liz?!

(another knock)

It's not locked, just come in! I need help, I – !

*(**ELDER THOMAS** enters, wearing a white shirt, black tie, and black slacks. He holds some books and a bike helmet.)*

ELDER THOMAS. Oh, my God. Oh, Gosh, are you – ?

(pause)

I should call an ambulance. Should I call an ambulance?

*(**ELDER THOMAS** notices the gay porn, still playing. **CHARLIE** quickly reaches over and shuts his laptop.)*

I don't have a phone, do you have – ?

*(**CHARLIE** pulls out a few sheets of paper, hands them to **ELDER THOMAS**.)*

CHARLIE. Read this to me.

ELDER THOMAS. Wait, what?

CHARLIE. Read it to me, *please.*

ELDER THOMAS. I have to call you an ambulance! I don't know what to do, I'm just –

CHARLIE. I don't know what's going to happen in the next five minutes. Please, read it to me. PLEASE JUST READ IT TO ME.

ELDER THOMAS. OKAY! OKAY, I JUST –

(reading, quickly)

"In the amazing book *Moby Dick* by the author Herman Melville, the author recounts his story of being at sea. In the first part of his book, the author, calling himself Ishmael, is in a small sea-side town and he is sharing a bed with a man named Queequeg – "

(stops)

What is this?! Why am I reading this?! I need to call someone – !

CHARLIE. *(pleading)* PLEASE JUST READ IT. *ANY OF IT.*

ELDER THOMAS. *(reading)* "I was very saddened by this book, and I felt many emotions for the characters. And I felt saddest of all when I read the boring chapters that were only descriptions of whales, because I knew that the author was just trying to save us from his own sad story, just for a little while. This book made me think about my own life, and then it… It made me feel… "

*(***CHARLIE***'s breathing starts to become normal. He takes a few deep breaths, calming himself down.)*

Did that – help?

CHARLIE. Yes. Yes, it did.

ELDER THOMAS. I'm calling an ambulance, where's your phone?

CHARLIE. I don't go to hospitals.

ELDER THOMAS. I can't help you, I don't even know CPR – !

CHARLIE. *I don't go to hospitals.*

(pause)

I'm sorry. Excuse me, I'm sorry. You can go if you want, I… Thank you for reading that to me.

(Pause. **ELDER THOMAS** *doesn't move.)*

ELDER THOMAS. Are you feeling better?

CHARLIE. Yes.

ELDER THOMAS. Are you sure?

CHARLIE. Yes.

ELDER THOMAS. Okay. Um. I –

(pause)

I represent the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints? We're sharing a message for all faiths?

CHARLIE. Oh.

ELDER THOMAS. Yeah.

(pause)

Would you – like to hear about the Church?

(pause)

CHARLIE. Okay.

ELDER THOMAS. Really?

CHARLIE. Yes. Actually, yes.

(pause)

But I should call my friend. My friend is a nurse. She should come over. She knows what to do, she – takes care of me.

ELDER THOMAS. Okay, good, where's your – ?

CHARLIE. My cell phone is over there, can you get it for me?

*(***CHARLIE** *points to a cell phone on the other side of the room.* **ELDER THOMAS** *picks up the cell phone and hands it to* **CHARLIE**.*)*

ELDER THOMAS. Do you want me to – … ?

CHARLIE. Stay with me.

(pause)

ELDER THOMAS. I really should –

CHARLIE. I'm not sure what's going to happen right now. I'd – rather there was someone here with me. If that's alright.

ELDER THOMAS. Yeah, okay.

CHARLIE. Thank you.

(pause)

ELDER THOMAS. What was – ? That thing I read to you about *Moby Dick*?

CHARLIE. It was an essay. It's my job, I do online tutoring, online classes on expository writing.

ELDER THOMAS. But why did you want me to read that to you?

CHARLIE. Because I thought I was dying. And I wanted to hear it one last time.

Later that Afternoon.

*(***CHARLIE** *sits on the couch,* **LIZ** *stands over him, taking his blood pressure.* **ELDER THOMAS** *sits in the corner.)*

LIZ. You should have called an ambulance.

CHARLIE. With no health insurance?

LIZ. Being in debt is better than being dead. What's wrong with you? Why is there a Mormon here?

CHARLIE. Did I have a heart attack?

LIZ. No, you didn't have a heart attack.

(reading his blood pressure)

Huh.

CHARLIE. What is it?

(pause)

LIZ. Tell me what you felt.

CHARLIE. Pain, in my chest. It was hard to breathe, I felt like I couldn't intake air.

LIZ. How are you sleeping?

CHARLIE. I'm tired all the time. I'm sleeping on the couch now actually, I can breathe better.

*(***LIZ** *takes out a stethoscope. She checks his breathing.)*

LIZ. You're wheezing.

CHARLIE. I always wheeze, Liz.

LIZ. You're wheezing more. Take a deep breath.

*(***CHARLIE** *takes a deep breath.)*

LIZ. Did that hurt?

CHARLIE. A little. What was my blood pressure?

LIZ. 238 over 134.

(Pause. **LIZ** *puts the stethoscope away.)*

CHARLIE. Oh.

LIZ. Yeah. Oh.

(pause)

CHARLIE. Could you hand me my walker? I haven't been to the bathroom all day, I'm ready to explode.

*(***LIZ** *hands him his walker,* **CHARLIE** *gets up with some effort. It's obvious he's having chest pain.)*

*(***LIZ** *watches him.)*

LIZ. You want help?

CHARLIE. No, I'm fine. Just – . Sorry.

LIZ. What are you sorry about?

CHARLIE. Sorry. I don't know. Sorry.

*(***CHARLIE** *makes his way to the bathroom, wheezing loudly.)*

*(***ELDER THOMAS** *and* **LIZ** *look at one another.)*

ELDER THOMAS. I should go.

LIZ. Thank you. For helping him.

(pause)

You on your mission?

ELDER THOMAS. What?

LIZ. Is this your mission? You're on your mission now?

ELDER THOMAS. Oh – yeah.

LIZ. Where are you from?

ELDER THOMAS. Iowa.

LIZ. You grew up in Iowa and they sent you to *Idaho* on your mission?

ELDER THOMAS. Yeah, I don't know. Some of my friends got to go to Los Angeles. A few went to South America. It's – fine.

(pause)

Is he going to be – ?

LIZ. No. No, he's not.

ELDER THOMAS. He's sick?

LIZ. He's very, very, very sick.

(pause)

I grew up Mormon.

ELDER THOMAS. Really? Oh, that's – that's actually nice to hear, I actually haven't run into a lot of others. Surprising, small town in Idaho, you'd think you'd… Do you go to the church over near the highway, or the – ?

LIZ. I fucking hate Mormons.

(small pause)

I shouldn't say that, I don't fucking hate Mormons, I fucking hate Mormon*ism*. How can you believe in a God like that? He gives us the Old Testament, fine, we'll all be Jews. Then Jesus shows up and he's like, "Hey so, I'm the son of God, stop being Jewish, here's the New Testament, sorry." And then he shows up a *second* time, and he's like, "Oh, shit, sorry! Here's this other thing, it's called the Book of Mormon." And after all that, we're still supposed to wait around for him to come back a *third fucking time* to kill us all with holy fire and dragons and –

ELDER THOMAS. That's a really unfair summary of my beliefs.

LIZ. I'm just saying, why would God not just give us all the right answers to begin with?

ELDER THOMAS. He has a plan.

LIZ. A plan that he's constantly revising.

ELDER THOMAS. I guess.

(pause)

LIZ. Look – it was good of you to stay with him. But if you're waiting around to convert him, or –

ELDER THOMAS. We don't "convert people". Our message is a message of hope for / people of all faiths –

LIZ. People of all faiths, I know, you're sweet. But he's not interested in what you have to say. It's the last thing he wants to hear.

(lights up a cigarette)

Listen, you can go if you want. I know Charlie appreciates what you did.

ELDER THOMAS. He said he wanted to hear about the church.

(pause)

LIZ. Charlie said he wanted to hear about the church?

ELDER THOMAS. Yes.

(pause)

LIZ. No, he doesn't.

ELDER THOMAS. Why not?

LIZ. I just know.

ELDER THOMAS. How?

LIZ. Because it's caused him a lot of pain.

ELDER THOMAS. How?

LIZ. It killed his boyfriend.

(pause)

ELDER THOMAS. You're saying the church –

LIZ. – killed his boyfriend. Yes, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints killed Charlie's boyfriend.

(pause)

And I should add that, personally, the Mormon Church has caused *me* a lot of pain in *my* life. That guy in there is the only person I have any more that even resembles a friend, and I am not letting you come over here to talk to him. Especially not now, not this week.

ELDER THOMAS. Why not this week?

LIZ. Because he's probably not going to be here next week.

ELDER THOMAS. Where is he going?

*(**CHARLIE** comes back out from the bathroom on his walker, moves toward the couch.)*

CHARLIE. I'm sorry you had to come over, Liz. And I'm sorry –

LIZ. It's alright.

CHARLIE. I'm sorry that I always think I'm dying.

(pause)

LIZ. Charlie, your blood pressure is 238 over 134.

CHARLIE. That's not much more than it usually is.

LIZ. Yes, it is. And your normal blood pressure is at near-fatal levels as it is.

(pause)

CHARLIE. I'm sorry, I'm feeling better now. You can go back to –

LIZ. Go to the hospital.

CHARLIE. I'm sorry.

LIZ. Stop saying you're sorry. Go to the hospital.

CHARLIE. Liz – I'm sorry –

LIZ. I'm calling an ambulance and they're going to take you to the hospital!

CHARLIE. I can't!

LIZ. You're going to die, Charlie. You have congestive heart failure. If you don't go to the hospital, you will die. Probably before the weekend. You. Will. Die.

(pause)

CHARLIE. Then I should probably keep working, I have a lot of essays this week.

LIZ. GODAMMIT CHARLIE.

CHARLIE. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I know, I'm – an awful person. I know. I'm sorry.

(pause)

ELDER THOMAS. Do you still want to hear about the church?

LIZ. NO. HE DOES NOT.

ELDER THOMAS. Okay. That's fine, I'm sorry, I – I'll go.

(pause)

I still don't understand why you wanted me to read that essay to you.

(pause)

CHARLIE. It's a really good essay.

ELDER THOMAS. I actually thought it was pretty bad.

CHARLIE. It got a bad grade. But – it's a really, really good essay.

*(***ELDER THOMAS** *exits. A few beats pass.)*

LIZ. Did you tell him you wanted to hear about the Church?

CHARLIE. He's just a kid, Liz. He helped me out.

*(***CHARLIE** *grunts in pain, holding his chest a bit.)*

LIZ. What?

CHARLIE. I'm fine.

LIZ. No, you're not.

(pause)

CHARLIE. I think – I need to call Ellie.

LIZ. Ellie?

CHARLIE. Yeah.

(pause)

LIZ. What, so you're like – giving up?

CHARLIE. What else am I supposed to do?

LIZ. Go to the hospital!

CHARLIE. Okay, I could go to the hospital. Get a bypass operation or whatever. Rack up several hundred thousand dollars of hospital bills that I won't be able to pay back, ever. Then I'll come back home, maybe, and last – what? A year? At the most? All so I could spend another year in what I'm sure is no small amount of pain.

LIZ. Nice positive thinking, Charlie. This affects me too, you know? You're my *friend*.

CHARLIE. I know. I'm sorry.

LIZ. You say you're sorry again, I'm going to shove a knife right into you, I swear to –

CHARLIE. Go ahead, what's it gonna do? My internal organs are two feet in at least.

(Pause. **LIZ** *laughs.)*

LIZ. Fuck you.

*(***CHARLIE** *smiles. They look at one another.)*

(Pause. Finally **LIZ** *sighs, goes to the couch, grabbing the remote. She sits next to* **CHARLIE***, puts her head on his shoulder.)*

(She turns on the television, flips through the channels absent mindedly.)

LIZ. I've been telling you that this was gonna happen.

CHARLIE. Yeah.

LIZ. Haven't I been telling you – ?

CHARLIE. Yes, I know. You have.

(pause)

LIZ. Well I'm not letting you just *die*. I don't care what you think, I'm not letting it happen.

*(***LIZ** *continues to flip through the channels. Silence.)*

CHARLIE. Did you bring food?

(Silence. **LIZ** *continues to flip channels.)*

Liz.

*(***LIZ** *flips a few more channels. Silence.)*

Please.

(A few more channels. Silence. Then, without looking at **CHARLIE***,* **LIZ** *goes to her bag and pulls out a large bucket of fried chicken. She puts the chicken in* **CHARLIE***'s lap, keeping her eyes on the television.)*

Thank you.

*(***CHARLIE** *opens up the bucket, takes out some chicken, starts eating.* **LIZ** *continues to flip channels, then lands on one.)*

LIZ. Judge Judy, I've seen this one. It's good.

*(***CHARLIE** *continues to eat,* **LIZ** *watches the television.)*

Night.

*(***CHARLIE***, alone, much later that night. The television is on at a low level. As he finishes, he turns off the TV, staring forward silently for a moment.)*

CHARLIE. *(soft)* In the first part of his book, the author, calling himself Ishmael, is in a small sea-side town and he is sharing a bed with a man named Queequeg.

*(***CHARLIE** *takes a breath, tries to make himself comfortable on the couch.)*

The author and Queequeg go to church and hear a sermon about Jonah, and later set out on a ship captained by the pirate named Ahab, who is missing a leg, and very much wants to kill the whale which is named Moby Dick, and which is white.

*(***CHARLIE** *breathes. He shifts on the couch, the movement causing pain in is chest.)*

In the course of the book, the pirate Ahab encounters many hardships. His entire life is set around trying to kill a certain whale. I think this is sad because this whale doesn't have any emotions, and doesn't know how bad Ahab wants to kill him.

*(***CHARLIE***'s settles into the couch, closes his eyes.)*

He's just a poor big animal. And I feel bad for Ahab as well, because he thinks that his life will be better if he can kill this whale, but in reality it won't help him at all. This book me made think about my own life. This book made me think about my own life. This book made me –

(Lights quickly snap to black.)

(In the darkness, there is the faint sound of waves lapping against the shore – so quiet that it's nearly indistinguishable. The sound continues for a moment, rising just a bit in volume, becoming a bit more discernible, before lights rise on:)

TUESDAY

Morning.

*(***CHARLIE** *sits on the couch.* **ELLIE** *stands near the door. There is an awkward silence.)*

ELLIE. How much?

CHARLIE. I haven't been able to weigh myself in years, it's hard to know. Five-fifty? Six hundred?

ELLIE. That's disgusting.

CHARLIE. I know. It is disgusting, I'm sorry.

ELLIE. Does this mean I'm going to get fat?

CHARLIE. No, it doesn't. I was always big, but I just – let it get out of control.

(Pause.)

ELLIE. Who was the woman?

CHARLIE. What woman?

ELLIE. There was a woman in the background, when you called me.

CHARLIE. Oh, that's – my friend, Liz.

ELLIE. You have a friend?

CHARLIE. Yeah. She's a nurse, she used to do in-house calls for the hospice –

ELLIE. Is she, like, your fag hag? Because it seems like she could do a lot better.

(Pause.)

CHARLIE. Was your mom okay with you coming here?

ELLIE. I didn't tell her. She would've freaked out.

(pause)

Why don't you just go to the hospital?

CHARLIE. I don't have health insurance.

ELLIE. But you might die.

CHARLIE. It's not worth it.

(pause)

It's really good to see you. You look beautiful. How's school going? You're a senior, right?

ELLIE. You actually care?

CHARLIE. Of course I care. I pester your mom for information as often as she'll give it to me.

(pause)

So why aren't – don't you have school?

ELLIE. Suspended until Friday.

CHARLIE. Oh. Why?

ELLIE. I blogged about my stupid bitch lab partner. She told her stupid bitch mom and the vice principal said it was "vaguely threatening".

CHARLIE. You don't like high school?

ELLIE. Only retards like high school.

CHARLIE. But – you're going to pass, right?

ELLIE. I'm failing most of my classes. My dumbass counselor says I might not graduate. I'm a smart person, I never forget anything. But high school is such bullshit. Busywork.

CHARLIE. It's important.

ELLIE. How would you know?

(pause)

So, what? You want me to like help you clean yourself or go to the bathroom or something? Because if you need someone to help you do that stuff, then you need to find someone else.

CHARLIE. You don't need to do anything disgusting, I promise.

ELLIE. Just being around you is disgusting. You smell disgusting. Your apartment is disgusting. You look disgusting. The last time I saw you, you were disgusting.

CHARLIE. There's no way you could remember that. You were two years old.

ELLIE. I'm a smart person, I never forget anything. In the living room, with that old red couch and the TV with the wood frame. And you were on the floor, and mom was screaming at you and you were just apologizing over and over, you were so pathetic. I remember that. Can I have one of those donuts?

(small pause)

CHARLIE. Yeah, sure.

*(***ELLIE** *grabs a donut from a package sitting near the kitchen.)*

ELLIE. You weren't all that heavy back then. I mean, you were fat, but not like this.

CHARLIE. Yeah.

ELLIE. Why did you gain all that weight?

(pause)

CHARLIE. I'd like us to spend some time together this week.

ELLIE. Why?

CHARLIE. We don't even know one another.

ELLIE. So?

(pause)

CHARLIE. I can pay you.

ELLIE. You want to pay me to spend time with you?

CHARLIE. And I can help you with your work. It's what I do for my job, I help people edit their essays –

ELLIE. Are you serious?

*(***CHARLIE** *picks up some essays sitting next to him.)*

CHARLIE. It's what I do all day long. I can help you pass your classes.

ELLIE. How are you like, qualified to edit essays?

CHARLIE. I have a masters degree. In English, from the U of I. I teach online classes, it's my job.

ELLIE. You teach online?

CHARLIE. Yes.

ELLIE. Your students know what you look like?

(pause)

CHARLIE. I don't use a camera. Just a microphone.

ELLIE. That's probably a good idea.

(pause)

Counselor dumbass says that if I show a lot of improvement in one subject that I might be able to pass. I can rewrite my old essays for credit, so you have to rewrite all of those, and write every other essay for the rest of the semester. And they have to be really good.

CHARLIE. I really shouldn't write them for you.

ELLIE. Well, it's what you're gonna do if you want me around. How much can you pay me?

CHARLIE. Whatever I have. All the money I have in the bank.

ELLIE. How much money do you have in the bank?

(pause)

CHARLIE. A hundred and twenty –

ELLIE. You want me to be here all week for a hundred and twenty dollars?

CHARLIE. Thousand. A hundred and twenty thousand dollars.

(pause)

I never go out, I don't have health insurance, all I pay for is food, internet, three-fifty a month in rent. And I work all the time.

ELLIE. You'd give all that money to *me*? Not my mom, to *me*?

CHARLIE. Yes. All of it. Just – don't mention it to your mom. Okay?

(pause)

Also… I'll write the essays for you, but I'd like you to do some writing yourself. Just for me. They don't have to be perfect, I'd just like you to write an essay or two for me.

ELLIE. Why?

CHARLIE. You're a smart person, I bet you're a strong writer. I want to know what you have to say. Plus, I'm a teacher. I want to make sure you're getting something out of this.

ELLIE. I don't even understand you.

(silence)

Stand up and walk over to me.

CHARLIE. What?

ELLIE. Come over here. Walk toward me. Come over here, beside me.

*(***CHARLIE** *pauses for a second, then reaches for his walker.)*

ELLIE. Without that thing. Just stand up, and come over here.

CHARLIE. Ellie, I can't really –

ELLIE. Shut up. Come over here.

*(***CHARLIE** *takes a few deep breaths, then tries to stand on his feet.)*

(He is unsuccessful at getting off the couch, his chest pain becoming severe. His breathing becomes quicker.)

(He tries again, this time he nearly gets up on his feet, but falls backward when the pain becomes unbearable. He is wincing from the pain, lying back on the couch, wheezing loudly.)

*(***ELLIE** *stares at him, unmoved.)*

Night.

*(***CHARLIE** *sits on the couch.* **LIZ** *is standing near* **CHARLIE** *fiddling with a small machine with electrodes attached to it.)*

*(***LIZ** *has brought various bulk-sized groceries, they sit near the door still in bags.)*

LIZ. I don't remember what it's called, something ridiculous, I don't remember. But it's for you, it's going to help you out. This machine here, it senses perspiration. It's an indicator of stress. So the idea is, if you know what makes your stress level go up, you can learn to control it. And that'll reduce your heart rate, lower your blood pressure.

*(***LIZ** *starts attaching the machine to* **CHARLIE***'s hand.)*

CHARLIE. Where did you get this thing?

LIZ. Ginny, from the hospital, she's into this stuff.

CHARLIE. Do you know how to use it?

LIZ. If Ginny can figure it out, I'm sure it's not that hard. Here.

(turns on the machine)

You see that number right there? That's how much you're sweating. You wanna try and take that number go down.

(pause)

CHARLIE. So what do I – ?

LIZ. I don't know, just – relax. Take a deep breath. You're calm. You're very, very calm.

*(***CHARLIE** *takes a deep breath.* **LIZ** *rubs his shoulders a bit, watching the machine.)*

LIZ. There, the number's going down. Isn't that better? It's about establishing a relationship between your brain and your body. Now you know you're calming yourself down because the little machine is telling you so.

CHARLIE. You really think this is going to help?

LIZ. Yes! It'll help, you just – need to do this all the time.

(Pause. **LIZ** *continues to rub his shoulders and watch the machine.)*

CHARLIE. Ellie came over.

(pause)

LIZ. She did?

CHARLIE. Yes.

(pause)

She's – amazing.

LIZ. Yeah?

CHARLIE. And – angry. Very angry. She's coming back tomorrow. I'm writing her essays for her, for school. She's failing most of her classes, I think. She's smart, I can tell she's smart, she just doesn't –

LIZ. Charlie, do you really – ? You really think this is a good idea?

CHARLIE. What do you mean?

LIZ. Sorry, but you haven't seen this girl since she was two years old, and *now* you want to reconnect with her? By doing her homework for her?

CHARLIE. It's fine. It'll be fine.

LIZ. What is she gonna do if something happens to you, if you need help?

CHARLIE. I just want to spend some time with her, get to know her. I'm – worried about her.

LIZ. Why?

CHARLIE. She has this – website.

*(***CHARLIE** *opens up his laptop, pulls up a website.)*

*(***LIZ** *looks at the computer.)*

LIZ. I don't understand, what am I looking at?

CHARLIE. She calls it a "hate blog". She posts pictures of her friends, her mom even, and she just – insults

them. The only thing she ever talks about is how much she doesn't like people.

LIZ. Huh. She's an angry little girl.

CHARLIE. Yes, she is. And I'm worried.

LIZ. She's just being a teenager. She'll be fine, she's got her mom to look out for her.

*(***LIZ** *goes to her shopping bags, puts the food away in the kitchen as she talks.)*

LIZ. Listen, you shouldn't worry about her. When I was a kid – when my dad would really piss me off – I used to go to the supermarket over on Johnson, you remember that big place that used to be out there?

CHARLIE. Sure.

LIZ. I used to just – *trash* the place. And I was really good at it, I never got caught. I'd walk in really normally, wait until I was in an aisle with no one in it, and then I'd – very quietly – destroy it. Open all the jars and boxes, spill everything on the floor. Pour out the milk, smash the produce under my feet. By the time I was done, they didn't know what hit them. Like this silent tornado had swept through the whole store. I was one angry little girl.

CHARLIE. You never told me about that.

LIZ. Yeah, well, it's not exactly a time in my life I love to think about, or – .

(pause)

I'm just saying, you should be thankful that Ellie's doing this shit on the internet and not getting herself into real trouble.

*(***LIZ** *takes an extra large meatball sub out of a shopping bag, brings it to* **CHARLIE**. **CHARLIE** *starts eating it, fairly quickly.)*

LIZ. Just don't get too worked up about this. You don't need anything stressing you out right now.

*(***LIZ** *heads back to the kitchen.)*

CHARLIE. I just want to make sure she's doing okay.

LIZ. She has a mother, Charlie. She's not alone, she has her mom.

CHARLIE. Well, she –

*(***CHARLIE** *stops, choking on the meatball sub.* **LIZ** *remains in the kitchen, not noticing him.)*

(Pause. **CHARLIE** *starts to panic.)*

LIZ. What?

(no response)

Charlie, you okay?

*(***LIZ** *comes out of the kitchen, sees* **CHARLIE**.*)*

LIZ. Oh God. Oh God, are you choking?! You're choking?!

*(***CHARLIE** *leans forward as best he can,* **LIZ** *hits his back a few times. It doesn't help.)*

LIZ. Okay, okay – lean over the arm!

*(***CHARLIE** *struggles to lean over the arm of the couch, stomach down. As best as she can,* **LIZ** *pushes on* **CHARLIE***'s back, attempting the Heimlich Maneuver. Finally, she puts all her weight into it, and* **CHARLIE** *spits out the piece of food.)*

LIZ. *Shit.* Oh, shit, Charlie.

CHARLIE. *(breathing heavily)* I'm okay. I'm okay.

*(***LIZ** *sits back down.* **CHARLIE** *rolls back into a sitting position on the couch. Long pause.)*

LIZ. GODDAMMIT CHARLIE, WHAT IS WRONG WITH YOU?

CHARLIE. I'm sorry –

LIZ. Chew your food like a normal human being! You could have choked to death just then, you realize that?! *You could have died right in front of me, you could have just – !*

(Silence. **LIZ** *breathes.)*

CHARLIE. I'm sorry, Liz.

(Another silence. **LIZ** *calms down. She looks at her watch, then grabs the remote control, turning on the television.)*

LIZ. *House* is on. Preview looked good, a guy whose arm has a mind of its own, something like that.

(pause)

You want a Dr. Pepper?

(pause)

CHARLIE. *(quiet)* I'm sorry, Liz.

LIZ. I asked if you want a Dr. Pepper.

(pause)

CHARLIE. *(quieter)* I'm sorry.

(Lights quickly snap to black.)

(The sound of waves returns, this time just a bit louder, rising in volume until lights rise on:)