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The Good Counselor

by Kathryn Grant

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION



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FRENCH**
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**Originally produced by Premiere Stages at
Kean University, Union, NJ.**

THE GOOD COUNSELOR was originally produced at Premiere Stages at Kean University in Union, New Jersey on July 15, 2010. The performance was directed by John Wooten, with sets by Joseph Gourley, lighting by Nadine Charlson, costumes by Karen Hart, sound by Charles Lawlor, and dramaturgy by Erica Nagel. The production stage manager was Dale Smallwood. The cast was as follows:

VINCENT.....Edward O’Blenis
RAY.....Erik LaRay Harvey
RITA.....Geany Masai
EVELYN.....Susan Louise O’Connor
MAIA.....Socorro Santiago

THE GOOD COUNSELOR was the winner of the 2010 Premiere Stages Play Festival and the 2010 Jerry Kaufman Award in Playwriting.

THE GOOD COUNSELOR, originally conceived as a creative dissertation under the title, *The Family Way*, was written in satisfaction of a Doctor of Letters degree from the Arts and Letters Program at Drew University in New Jersey under the guidance of Rosemary McLaughlin and Carol Wipf. Retitled *Wonderful Counselor* in 2006, it received further developmental support from the American Renaissance Theater Company, The Actors Studio Playwright and Director’s Unit, the Ensemble Studio Theater, LAByrinth Theater Company, the Abingdon Theater, and the Barrow Group Theater. I am deeply grateful to all of the organizations and artists who participated in the development of this play.

–KG

CHARACTERS

VINCENT HEFFERNON (27-34 years old) is an African-American public defender practicing law in a rural county. He is the youngest in a family of four children and the only one in the family who has made it into the professional class. Vincent is sharp, mercurial and slick in some ways, altering his persona to suit the situation, but in other ways, he is fragile. He is not at ease with himself or reconciled to his position as the favored son in a struggling family.

RAY HEFFERNON (29-36 years old) is Vincent's older brother, an African-American man currently working as a roofer. He has a history of drug addiction that may mask an underlying mood disorder like bipolar.

RITA HEFFERNON (60-75 years old) is Ray and Vincent's mother. She is in poor health but struggles to stay out of bed and keep up appearances. Widowed at a young age, she raised her children on her own, takes pride in her autonomy and has little truck for those who aren't able to manage life's challenges. She has pushed some dark episodes in her life into a corner and finds refuge in her church and the teachings of the Bible.

VELYN LAVERTY (20-30 years old) is a single white mother currently a suspect in the death of her infant. Although she loves her remaining five-year old daughter, she had mixed feelings about her infant and insecurities about her competence as a mother. Before her incarceration, she drank to take the edge off of all the chaos that was piling up in her world. She is not an appealing candidate to put on the stand in court because she is scared, truculent and a knee-jerk racist.

MAYA ARUNA (45-70 years old) is the supervisor in the county's Office of the Public Defender. Originally the role was written for an Indian-American, but the role can be cast as a nationalized citizen born in South or Central America, Mexico, the Caribbean, one of the countries of the former Soviet Union, a South East Asian Country or any other country (not African) with large segments of the population living in poverty (change name as needed.) She has lived a good portion of her life in close proximity to the poor and she doesn't romanticize their lives. Her immigrant status gives her an outsider's perspective. She isn't mired in American views of motherhood and the management of families. Notwithstanding these differences, she is deeply patriotic and fervent about the possibilities of American jurisprudence. Both pragmatic and hopelessly liberal, she is what is known as a "public defense lifer," passionate about defending the poor, whether they are guilty of a crime or not.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

There are a number of stylistic challenges in the play, chiefly those that require the audience to accept leaps through time and place. I have included some ways that a production might resolve them, for example in John Wooten's production at Premiere Stages, when time shifted in the first act, the actor playing Vincent put a private school emblem on his blazer indicating that he was now a young man (thank you, John.) But there may be other ways to resolve these leaps using projections, sounds, lighting or music. I leave most of the details to the artists who will come up with innovations that will be right for their particulars of space, staff, available resources and audience.

For Ed.

ACT I

Prologue

(Two pools of light pick out VINCENT and RITA on opposite sides of the stage. VINCENT, a public defender, delivers his closing argument in court. As he does this, RITA, prepares for church, humming a hymn. RITA is a woman in her 60s but she looks much older. Her body is riddled with arthritis and other middling afflictions. She is seated, wearing a slip, and putting cream on her body. When she is done, she sits back and catches her breath. She grabs onto a cane for support, she rocks back and forth a few times to find momentum, and then makes the push to stand. She finds her balance and stands still for a moment. In a way, she is magnificent. Finally sure, she then begins to put on her dress and shoes. As she performs these actions, VINCENT speaks.)

VINCENT. A woman lives in our minds. She is clean, skin supple, hair fragrant and with soft arms open, she welcomes you into a pillowy embrace. She leads you through rooms that are quiet and cool, free of the day to day of dust and fingerprints. You come to a table heavy with your favorite foods, hot, steaming, succulent and with a voice, low and tuneful, she invites you to take your fill. And as you do, you become whole again. For to be in these rooms under the glow of her presence is never to want – she anticipates your every desire. And yet she seems to be without desire. She is contentment itself...so happy is she to be at your beck and call.

(pause)

VINCENT. In short, she is perfection just around the bend and a footstep out of reach. And she taunts you with the notion of the person you might have been had you been blessed with a mother such as she.

(pause)

This is the woman who is in our minds when we ask ourselves the question, “Is Evelyn Lavery a good mother?” I want you to put that woman aside for the moment. Don’t worry, she won’t go away. She is eternal.

(Lights come down on RITA as VINCENT strides out of the courtroom and moves into another time and place.)

Scene One

(As VINCENT moves away from the courtroom lights come up on the living room of Rita Heffernon’s house in a rural county two to three hours from a metropolitan center. It is a house that was built in the twenties to house factory workers. It can be depicted simply. Just some seating and a display shelf with portraits of young people graduating high school and an array of trophies and framed awards. VINCENT stands regarding his older brother, RAY who is eating some sweet rolls with sugar icing.)

VINCENT. Mom make you those sweet rolls?

RAY. Yeah.

(pause)

Don’t look at me like that.

VINCENT. She never makes them for me anymore.

RAY. Guess you’re not the favorite.

VINCENT. Give me one of them bad boys.

(He grabs at RAY’s plate and RAY gets up to get away from him.)

RAY. Don’t get all grabby and shit. I’ll give you one.

(VINCENT *grabs his whole plate and walks away.*)

RAY. (*cont.*) Look at you. No better than a bread line skunk freak.

VINCENT. Shut up.

RAY. You got a bad case of the munchies. You bake when you wake?

VINCENT. (*laughing*) Oh, no, I leave the baking to you.

RAY. You're getting crumbs all over your suit.

VINCENT. (*Looking down.*) Shit!

RAY. Come here.

(*Takes out a handkerchief and brushes Vincent off.*)

Look at you. You can't go to church looking like that. You gonna' be a sanctified deacon, son.

VINCENT. Yeah, right.

(*finishing off the roll*)

I ate your roll. It was good.

RAY. There's more in the kitchen. You think I let you eat my last sweet roll!

(VINCENT *goes out to the kitchen, gets another couple of sweet rolls, gives one to RAY and sits down.*)

VINCENT. Mama told me about you doing the work down Crisfield.

RAY. Yeah.

VINCENT. Morton hook you up?

RAY. (*nodding*) He told me you called. Only guy who would see me.

VINCENT. He needed people.

RAY. No doubt. It's hot on them roofs.

VINCENT. Well, I think it's great you're working.

RAY. Yeah. It's great. Yeah. You try to get that tar and shit out your hair.

(*He bends down to show his brother his head.*)

Man I got a bald spot where that shit took me down to the scalp.

VINCENT. Ooooo, I can see that. Man! That is some raw shit.

RAY. You know that I am the only American on that roof. Bunch of Mexicans. They're teaching me Spanish. "Mucho trabaho, poco dinero."

VINCENT. That's good, man.

RAY. *(There is an awkward pause. He walks over to a hallway and calls.)* Hey woman, your other son is here.

RITA. *(shouting from offstage)* You boys aren't eating in my living room, getting crumbs on my clean covers are you?

RAY. *(calling in the same direction)* No, we ain't eating nothing.

(We hear the voice of RITA singing "Blessed Assurance.")

RAY walks back toward VINCENT.)

She's putting on her Sunday wig.

VINCENT. How do you know?

RAY. She's singing "Blessed Assurance."

VINCENT. You are one warped individual. You coming to church?

RAY. I don't know, man. Reverend Staunton'll try to save me. Get his quota for the month. Give me the whole deal. Total immersion, son. No doubt.

VINCENT. Oh, yeah!

RAY. He gets me in the baptismal pool, it'll be all over, you understand. He'll be keeping me under till I am seeing my whole life flashing –

VINCENT. And that ain't pretty!

RAY. Shit, that's butt ugly! But Mama, she's gonna walk into heaven on that day I get soaked.

VINCENT. *(getting into his groove)* She gonna walk on in all right!

RAY. What with her prodigal son swimmin' in the blood!

VINCENT. Oh, Lord!

RAY. (*getting into the spirit*) And then when she gets the spirit, it's gonna spread through that Church like swine flu! And then they all gonna' start going down!

VINCENT. Oh, they'll go down all right! You need some damn stretchers when that spirit starts working.

RAY. You'll need a regular fleet, son. Them ushers runnin' up and down the aisles draggin' them ladies out to the recovery room till it look like a Mash Unit. Perverted suckers lookin' up Mama's dress and all her garters poppin!

VINCENT. (*laughing*) Stop buggin' on me, Ray.

RAY. (*laughter subsiding*) Gawd, she's a sight for sore eyes, when she gets the spirit!

VINCENT. That she is!

RAY. It's almost worth going to Church just to see her get juiced.

VINCENT. (*Pause. He stops laughing.*) Really?

RAY. That's what's left of Miss Rita, man.

VINCENT. Oh, come on. She's all right.

RITA. (*yelling from offstage*) What you boys doing in there?

VINCENT. Nothing!

RITA. Am I hearing cussin'?

RAY. (*calling*) Don't put that on me, lady. That's your baptized son talking now.

VINCENT. Thanks.

RAY. (*shouting off*) Get yourself together, woman. Time ain't waitin' on no one.

VINCENT. You just got here?

RAY. No, man. Come last night to mow the lawn. You're letting it slip.

VINCENT. Yeah. I been busy at work.

RAY. You're in the papers.

(RAY *picks up a paper laying on the coffee table. He gives it to VINCENT.*)

VINCENT. Damn, how this get out? Mama see it?

RAY. Oh, yeah. She ain't none happy about it either.

VINCENT. Well, I don't get to pick my clients.

RAY. She guilty? She kill the baby?

VINCENT. I don't know, man.

RAY. That's what you always say.

VINCENT. I suppose.

RAY. That's pretty cold...leaving a baby in a bean field.

VINCENT. Yeah.

RAY. Behind that section eight trailer park!

VINCENT. Yeah, right under the railroad trestle.

RAY. Crackerjack bullshit all over that piece of land.

VINCENT. Yeah, yeah. I saw that.

RAY. She a crackhead? Methmonster?

VINCENT. I don't know, man. I can't talk. You know that.

(changing the subject)

Where you stayin'?

RAY. With Naomi. I'm watching the kids on Saturday when she has to work weekends.

VINCENT. That's good. Ray?

RAY. You better get Mama outta' here. You'll never get a parking spot near the entrance. And you know how 46 gets all balled up with the church traffic.

VINCENT. It's good to see you like this.

RAY. Good to see you, too. You could go out 42 North... take the bypass...but there's a a lot of construction...

VINCENT. No, I mean...you know what I mean.

RAY. You mean, when I'm not fucked up.

VINCENT. Yeah. Kind of. Yeah.

RAY. Thanks!

VINCENT. Oh, come on.

RAY. It's kind of dry out there, man. Rooftop minimum wage shit!

VINCENT. Can I help with anything?

RAY. No, man, I'm cool.

VINCENT. I can hook you up with a doctor, with therapists, anything.

RAY. I told you, I'm cool.

(VINCENT *struggles with how to say this.*)

VINCENT. Can I say I know you don't want to hear –

RAY. Wait. Stop!

VINCENT. What?

RAY. Just stop!

VINCENT. No. No, man, I wouldn't say – I just wanted –

RAY. No, man. Uh-uh. Just don't say anything. You want to jinx me? You piece of preppy shit!

(RAY *reaches over and hits VINCENT on the back of the head.*)

VINCENT. Hey, what the –

(VINCENT *reaches up to fend off RAY who is swatting at him still.*)

RAY. (*as he continues the onslaught*) You did that last time I tried to dry out. No. Shut the hell up, you little punk.

VINCENT. Okay! Okay! Leave me alone! Watch it now, Mama gonna' –

RAY. I'll kick your ass, you try to school me!

VINCENT. Okay!

(*He hears footsteps.*)

Shhhhhh!

RAY. Good.

(RITA *walks in. She stands there with her gloves and purse, looking at the mess of crumbs on her slipcovers.*)

RITA. Would you look at the mess you made on my covers. What kind of grown men have I raised?

(VINCENT *takes out a handkerchief and sweeps the crumbs onto a plate. RITA looks at RAY.*)

Raymond, you didn't bring something better to wear?

RAY. Change my mind.

RITA. What?

RAY. I don't want to go to church, Mom.

RITA. *(after a pause, steeling herself for a fight)* Fine. But you are not staying in the house.

RAY. So what am I supposed –

VINCENT. Come on, Mom. Ray is fine.

RITA. You will not stay alone in my house. Uh-uh. No, sir. This house is going to be locked up. And you won't be in it. I don't care what you do. You can walk to the strip mall. Something is opened.

(reaches into her purse)

Here's five dollars.

RAY. I don't want your money.

VINCENT. We can drop him off at Naomi's –

RITA. We don't have time. Now come on, let's go. Check the stove, Vincent.

VINCENT. It's off.

RITA. You sure?

VINCENT. It's off.

RITA. All right then.

(pulling on her gloves)

Let's lock up the house. Get the back door.

VINCENT. Jesus Christ, Mama!

RAY. It's okay, Vin.

VINCENT. Is this really necessary?

RITA. *(grimly)* Yes. I would say so. Uh-huh.

RAY. *(looking at his mother)* Lock the door. Go on, man, lock it.

(VINCENT, RITA, and RAY face off against each other.)

Scene Two

(Lights come down on the living room as VINCENT moves into a new area of the stage that suggests the interview room in a women's detention facility. We hear a clang as an unseen guard locks the door to an interview room. The sound echoes in a surreal way as it bounces off the concrete walls. VINCENT sits at a table with EVELYN LAVERTY, a white, 24 year-old, prisoner. EVELYN wears an orange jumpsuit. The sleeves are rolled up and you can see a large tattoo on her arm. The tattoo features a heart with the word "Pook" inscribed within it. Her sneakers don't have laces because she is on a "suicide watch." She has pulled out most of her eyelashes and eyebrows. VINCENT is clearly uncomfortable, trying to find his footing.)

VINCENT. Okay. We're not going anywhere, Evelyn. We might as well talk to each other. Why don't you tell me what happened.

EVELYN. Can you get me some cough drops? It's dusty in here.

VINCENT. You can't just bring stuff in like that. It's got to be cleared. I'll do it tomorrow.

EVELYN. Smith Brothers, cherry.

VINCENT. Sure. No problem.

(silence)

EVELYN. Can you get me some lashes?

VINCENT. Sorry?

EVELYN. *(She is pulling at her raw lids.)* False eyelashes.

VINCENT. Maybe you stop doing that, you won't need false eyelashes.

EVELYN. It's a habit.

(She stops.)

VINCENT. How are you eating?

EVELYN. All right.

VINCENT. Sleeping okay?

EVELYN. I sleep.

VINCENT. (*looking at her tattoo*) Nice tattoo. Who's "Pook"?

EVELYN. None of your business.

VINCENT. Okay. So maybe it's time that we should talk about the baby...your son...David's death.

(*pause*)

EVELYN. You have to do this job don't you?

VINCENT. I take the clients they assign me.

EVELYN. You have to do it.

VINCENT. Well, actually, I choose to be here. I don't have to do this work.

EVELYN. So why do you do it?

VINCENT. I get paid to argue. I like that.

EVELYN. So get me –

VINCENT. (*sharply*) But I am not a whipping boy.

EVELYN. Look like one.

VINCENT. I look like a whipping boy and you look like someone in deep shit.

EVELYN. Fuck you, white bread.

VINCENT. Oh, I'm white?

EVELYN. You don't act black.

VINCENT. (*smiling*) And yet, people still treat me like I'm black.

(*EVELYN glares at him.*)

Evelyn. Ms. Laverty.

(*During this speech he packs his note pad into a briefcase and puts on an overcoat.*)

You may not like black folks telling you what to do. That's kinda' hard for some people to swallow. But listen, I don't mean to offend you no ways, but to be real, listen, I get pissed on by a better class of white people than you. Yeah...I do.

(*takes a breath*)

VINCENT. *(cont.)* And you know what? It's been a long day. So let's just call it quits for now.

(He pushes a button on an intercom and speaks into it.)

My client needs an escort from the interview room, please.

EVELYN. Pook is my daughter.

VINCENT. Christina?

EVELYN. Yes.

VINCENT. Okay. I presume you want to see her again. Yes?

(She snorts.)

I'll take that as a yes. You have no shoelaces. You on a watch?

EVELYN. Yeah.

VINCENT. Don't go and do anything stupid all right?

EVELYN. I ain't gonna off myself.

VINCENT. Good. You owe your daughter that.

EVELYN. Don't you tell me what to do, faggot!

VINCENT. *(He cuts her off before she gets the word out.)* Here you go again. Stop shooting yourself in the foot, you are going to have plenty of folks that will do that for you.

(EVELYN snorts again.)

Hey, how about words for a starter. This snorting thing ain't gonna go down in court. You got a sinus condition or something?

EVELYN. No.

VINCENT. You just think about what I said. Figure it out, okay. Figure it out.

(He pushes the button on the intercom again.)

Guard!

(to EVELYN)

Don't talk to no one in here.

(pushing button again)

Guard!!

EVELYN. Could you... I think I should be allowed to call...

(She looks away.)

VINCENT. *(waiting)* You want to talk to Christina?

EVELYN. Yeah.

VINCENT. Okay. All right. I can hook you up with a phone call.

EVELYN. Promise?

VINCENT. Yeah. Most definitely. I'll hook you up.

(Lights fade out as VINCENT moves quickly away from the interview room.)

Scene Three

(VINCENT walks into another space as lights shift. He is now in the lobby of the building housing the office of the Public Defenders. MAIA, walking in from another direction, carries a load of briefs. From nearby, we hear protesters shouting, "Justice for Baby David. Justice for Baby David.")

VINCENT. *(stopping her before she can speak)* I'm not ready to make a statement.

MAIA. It might help. Public opinion could sink us. You represent a lot to the people of this county. Seeing your face on local TV –

VINCENT. I'm not showing my face yet. Okay?

MAIA. Fine. They're going for murder?

VINCENT. Murder One.

MAIA. Have you devised a strategy?

VINCENT. I'm still looking at the evidence.

MAIA. What about her state of mind?

VINCENT. I'm not sure how depressed she is. She rallied enough to get all racist and high-handed with me.

MAIA. Jailhouse puffery. Everyone who gives birth has some form of blues or blahs or something.

VINCENT. Maybe.

MAIA. Imagine passing a kidney stone the size of a bowling ball. Without an epidural!

VINCENT. I guess most women survive –

MAIA. Then a day after the blessed ordeal is over, the hospital kicks you out so you have to go back to a house that had fallen into ruin as a result of your supposedly joyful excursion into biology and modern obstetrics –

VINCENT. (*thrown in*) Okay, okay. Got it –

MAIA. Don't interrupt. Then nature gives you a final kick. The hormones take a free-fall nosedive. And suddenly you are tending to a colicky baby and wiping a shriveled up poopy bottom, sure that your life is over and singing Joni Mitchell tunes until your husband is ready to wring your neck.

VINCENT. Not to be rude –

MAIA. And when you finally have the nerve to leave the house and go to the grocery store, the check-out girl looks at your belly that won't go down even after you've dropped a nine-pound baby. And when she asks, "So when's the baby due?" That's when you want to take a soldering iron and cauterize your fallopian tubes!

VINCENT. I'm not sure I am ready for this level –

MAIA. And that's the nice middle-class scenario. Add to that all the other stuff that this young woman was facing, what is her name, Evelyn? A small child to tend to besides the baby, miserable living conditions! Come on, Vincent. Use your imagination!

VINCENT. I do have a mother, you know.

MAIA. So I understand.

VINCENT. She had to deal with all the shit this woman was facing. My dad died just after Naomi was born. She was living on a pittance, raising four kids.

MAIA. I know that your mother had it tough. She lived through some difficult –

VINCENT. And she didn't get herself into the mess this girl is in.

MAIA. Good for her. She was lucky.

VINCENT. Luck had nothing to do with it. She had a will and a notion of how she was determined to live. That's what she had.

MAIA. Well, this girl didn't have that?

VINCENT. No, I don't think so.

MAIA. How many of your clients have had that?

VINCENT. What?

MAIA. A will and a notion of how they are determined to live.

VINCENT. I don't know.

MAIA. Not many.

VINCENT. Maybe not.

(There is the sound of a hymn sung by a group of people. Unaccompanied. Rough and amateurish.)

MAIA. Oh shit, I'm due back in court in a half hour and I'm going to have to break through a prayer circle.

(pause)

After what...four, almost five years in this office, you still want things to be simple.

VINCENT. Yes, I do. I'm just a simple country boy.

MAIA. Okay, country boy. What have you got for me?

VINCENT. I have some character witnesses. Her daughter's teacher says she is a passable mother to Christina. Her boss at the supermarket says she was a tough cookie but dead honest and hard working. We have no evidence that she's a druggie, she steered clear of all that, but she drinks. She has a prior arrest, a DUI and we have Jack Hoover, her neighbor who says she was drinking pretty heavily the night of David's death.

MAIA. Did they do a blood alcohol at her arraignment?

VINCENT. No.

MAIA. Any record of child abuse?

VINCENT. Uh, uh.

MAIA. Nothing with child protective services?

VINCENT. Nothing.

MAIA. Okay. The father?

VINCENT. He is out of state with a strong alibi. Oh, kind of a downer. A big downer, actually. Investigators said she showed a lack of emotion when she reported her child missing.

MAIA. Oh, dear. No one likes a stoic mother.

VINCENT. I'm afraid not.

MAIA. Stoic father is fine. Stoic mother. That's a no-no.

(pause)

Have you gotten her version of events yet?

VINCENT. No. Not really.

MAIA. You are giving the prosecutor's office plenty of time to prepare a rock solid case?

VINCENT. I can't just plow into her. She's a cactus!

MAIA. This could be big, Vincent. People are going to be writing about it. Conservatives, feminists, the lot!

VINCENT. I am not the only person who is having a hard time with this.

MAIA. A few fanatics waving posters at the courthouse are unnerving you? Come on!

VINCENT. Some of those fanatics are my people out there. Not some neo-Nazi, Ku Klux Klan wannabes.

MAIA. So some of them are black, is that what's bothering you?

VINCENT. Well it's less fun when the person calling you an Antichrist baptized you.

MAIA. You are not the local hero anymore?

VINCENT. My mother isn't talking to me.

MAIA. She'll get over it.

(pause)

Your client is poor, a racist pain in the ass and she could be a dicey mother. She still needs to be defended from people ready to chuck jurisprudence just so that they can forget that women like her exist.

(Vincent's cell phone rings.)

MAIA. *(cont.)* If that's another headhunter, tell them to keep their claws out of you, country boy, I need you in this office!

VINCENT. *(looking at the number)* It's my sister, my sister!

MAIA. Okay!

VINCENT. *(talking into the phone)* Hey Naomi...Oh, no!

(He puts his hand over the phone. To MAIA, whispering:)

Sorry, Maia.

MAIA. Everything all right?

VINCENT. It's just family shit. But I gotta' take it.

MAIA. I know from family shit. Take it. Take it. I'm gone.

(She leaves.)

VINCENT. *(speaking into the phone)* Easy, Naomi. I'll track him down.

(He starts to put on his suit coat.)

Oh, Naomi...don't tell Mama, okay? I mean, he may just be, you know...hanging out. Thanks.

(He hangs up the phone and looks out into space seeing something.)

Ray! You reckless bastard!

Scene Four

(As VINCENT stands lost in thought lights come up on RAY now 13, standing on a train trestle. VINCENT, turns and looks up at him and becomes dizzy.)

RAY. What you call me?

VINCENT. *(hopping out of life in the now, enters into memory, finding his way toward the train trestle*)* You are a crazy, reckless bastard!

*The actor playing Vincent can turn his back and place a magnetized emblem on his blazer to create a private school uniform.

RAY. (*laughing*) Look at you. It's the motherfucking FBI.

(*cowering*)

Don't shoot! Don't shoot!

VINCENT. Shut up. Come on! Get down.

RAY. That the monkey suit they put you in at the academy?

VINCENT. Yeah, what of it?

RAY. (*losing it, hysterical*) Oh shit!

VINCENT. (*slipping into his adolescent self*) It's a uniform.

Everyone wears it!

RAY. At least you fit in with the rest of them freaks.

VINCENT. Okay fine. Just get down.

RAY. Just cause you goin' to that phoneyass place where all the preppie freaks thinks they better –

VINCENT. Mama made me –

RAY. – don't you think you gonna' start schooling me.

VINCENT. God, no, who would try to school –

RAY. You may be the book learner in the family but that don't mean you ain't stupid!

VINCENT. Of course, Ray, sure! I'm stupid.

RAY. Just so you know.

VINCENT. No, Ray, everyone knows I'm stupid and you're the genius in the family.

RAY. Yeah, that's right!

VINCENT. You're so smart you don't even have to go to school, huh?

RAY. Don't get cute on me and shit!

VINCENT. Come on, Ray. It's starting to get dark. Let's go home.

RAY. Nah!

VINCENT. Mama's going nuts! The washer died again and Carrie has another one of her earaches. Mama was cussin! And you know what that means!

RAY. (*letting his mask slip for a second*) She care so much, whyn't she come looking?

VINCENT. She's tired running after you!

RAY. So I will do what I want.

(looking him over)

Look at you, hunkering down. Stand up, ya sissie!

VINCENT. No thanks. I don't want to fall.

RAY. You ain't gonna fall.

(taking his arm)

Come on, I got you. Straighten up! Open your eyes.

VINCENT. Don't touch me! Don't –

(He opens his eyes. Tentatively, he looks down.)

Look at that! There's our house, looking like a piece on a monopoly board!

RAY. Yeah!

VINCENT. Down there with Mama on top of us...you forget there's all this.

RAY. Life don't begin and end with our 3/4 acre of land.

VINCENT. I guess not.

(They pause for a moment, looking out. VINCENT sees something.)

Is that the paper mill over there near the dump?

RAY. *(looking away)* Uh-huh.

VINCENT. *(after a moment)* Hey man, where do you go when you take off? You don't just sleep on a trestle.

RAY. I've got friends.

VINCENT. Were you with your friends when Mama told me you were at Aunt Rose's in Turnbeck?

RAY. *(touching his bandaged arms)* I was with Aunt Rose. Always have me runnin' after her dentucreme and shit –

VINCENT. Mmmmmm. I don't think so.

RAY. Oh yeah? What you think, smartass?

VINCENT. I don't know, Ray. Things changed after you went away that time. Something happened.

RAY. Nothing happened. Ain't nothing going on in Turnbeck.

VINCENT. Some of the kids have been saying things –

RAY. What they saying?

VINCENT. About those people who live in the paper mill.

RAY. *(suddenly his volatile side fires up)* Tell those motherfuckers to shut the hell up!!!

VINCENT. *(frightened of this side of his brother)* I'll tell them, Ray.

RAY. I'll beat the shit out of them, you understand?

VINCENT. You'll kick some asses! I'll tell them, shut the hell up.

(The sound of a train in the distance.)

Ray, look! We got to get off this trestle now!!!

RAY. Fuck the train. I ain't moving!

VINCENT. Ray!!! Come on.

(starting to leave)

Jesus Christ, I'm getting down. You can get yourself killed.

(VINCENT starts to move toward one end of the tracks where he can get off and RAY grabs his arm.)

RAY. *(has gotten himself into a bad place)* Come on, don't leave me just as all the fun is going to start. Come on, boy. Show me what you got.

(VINCENT tries to break free as the sound of the train gets louder. RAYMOND pulls him down. They begin to wrestle. RAY is laughing. VINCENT is angry and scared.)

VINCENT. Let me go!

(VINCENT takes a slug at RAY. RAY laughs.)

RAY. Is that your best? That all you got?

(They wrestle some more, panting and groaning. The train sounds become more insistent.)

VINCENT. *(starts to cry)* Jesus, Ray. We're going to die!

RAY. *(Looking over his shoulder. Realizes he has taken it too far.)*

Oh shit! Stop fighting and just hold onto me. I know what to do!

VINCENT. No you don't! You'll kill both of us!

RAY. Stop it.

VINCENT. LET GO!!!!

RAY. Hold on. I know where to stand and let the train pass!

(He maneuvers the two of them onto a cross beam that extends out from the tracks. VINCENT gasps as the train approaches.)

Breathe.

VINCENT. *(crying)* Why did you get us into this?

RAY. Settle down, now. It'll pass. I'm holding on, little brother. Holding on to you.

(RAY locks VINCENT in an embrace and pushes him against an unseen structure. A strobe indicates the passing of a train.)

Scene Five

(When the lights come back up again VINCENT is standing with his jacket in hand in the interview room in the county jail. EVELYN has just entered and she regards VINCENT who is struggling to get his breath.)

EVELYN. What's wrong?

VINCENT. What?

EVELYN. You're breathing like your gonna' die.

VINCENT. I'm – I'm – I walked up the stairs. It's nothing. Nothing.

EVELYN. Elevator out of order?

VINCENT. I don't take elevators.

EVELYN. You're strange.

VINCENT. *(Taking a notebook and pen out of a briefcase. Trying to get his breathing under control.)* Okay, I don't have much time. Let's get moving on this. The prosecution

is going to try and depict you as someone who doesn't – someone who has some ambivalence – some mixed feelings –

EVELYN. I'm a good mother.

VINCENT. Can we prove that to a jury?

(She is silent. He reads from a notebook.)

Your neighbor says you told him on the afternoon before David died that you were ready to "kill the fucking brats."

EVELYN. *(snapping)* What?

VINCENT. *(unswerving)* That's what he said.

EVELYN. Liar!

VINCENT. Really?

EVELYN. Well...I don't remember everything I say. Do you?

VINCENT. If you take the stand, we can't fudge the truth and we can't let ourselves get eaten alive by the prosecution.

EVELYN. I want my daughter back.

VINCENT. So.

(pause, then forcefully)

Did you say it?

EVELYN. I didn't mean it.

VINCENT. *(firmly)* But you said it.

EVELYN. There was no heat in the apartment. The washer wasn't working.

VINCENT. So you are saying you said it. I just want to be clear.

EVELYN. You stay at home all day in one room with two – Don't tell me your mother never said things like that when she was strung out!

VINCENT. I don't remember.

EVELYN. See?

VINCENT. See what?

EVELYN. Forget it.

VINCENT. You better think about how you gonna' answer that, Evelyn.

(He takes out a pad and gets back to business. The next questions are asked quickly, much as a doctor does an initial intake.)

Social services says that you refused to identify the baby's father when you gave birth?

EVELYN. That's right.

VINCENT. Okay. Do you have a relationship with this man?

EVELYN. No.

VINCENT. Is he Christina's father as well?

EVELYN. No. Her father's in prison. We haven't spoken in three years. Their fathers aren't even in the state.

VINCENT. So fine. Let's leave them out of this. Okay. Did your caseworker ever pay you any visits?

EVELYN. No, they said at the hospital, they were going to come out to see my new apartment, but they didn't.

VINCENT. *(looks up from his writing)* So this was a new place for you and the children?

EVELYN. Yeah. We moved because the old place was condemned after the flood.

VINCENT. And this new place was supposed to be an improvement?

EVELYN. Yeah.

(EVELYN gets up and starts to move around the room, pushing up against the walls with various parts of her body like a cat.)

VINCENT. *(noting her discomfort)* You need a glass of water or anything?

EVELYN. I'm okay.

VINCENT. Okay. Let's keep going. When was the last time you saw David?

EVELYN. When I went to bed.

VINCENT. And that was?

EVELYN. About 11 o'clock.

VINCENT. He was asleep by then?

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