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How the World Began

by Catherine Trieschmann

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION



**SAMUEL
FRENCH**

FOUNDED 1830

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**The world premiere of *How The World Began*
was produced jointly during the 2011-12 season in New York City by
Women's Project Theater (Julie Crosby, Producing Artistic Director)
and in Costa Mesa, California by South Coast Repertory**

***How The World Began* was originally commissioned by the
Manhattan Theatre Club (Lynne Meadow, Artistic Director;
Barry Grove, Executive Producer)
with funds provided by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation**

HOW THE WORLD BEGAN had its world premiere produced by South Coast Repertory in association with Women's Project Theater in Costa Mesa, California on September 25, 2011. The performance was directed by Daniella Topol, with scenic and costume design by Sara Ryung Clement, lighting by Paul Whitaker, sound and original music by Darron L. West, and dramaturgy by Kelly L. Miller. The Production Stage Manager was Jennifer Ellen Butler. The cast was as follows:

SUSAN PIERCE Sarah Rafferty
MICAH STAAB. Jarrett Sleeper
GENE DINKEL. Time Winters

HOW THE WORLD BEGAN was also produced by Women's Project Theater in New York City on December 28, 2011. The performance was directed by Daniella Topol, with set and costume design by Clint Ramos, lighting by Brian H. Scott, sound and original music by Darron L. West, and dramaturgy by Megan E. Carter. The Production Stage Manager was Jack Gianino. The cast was as follows:

SUSAN PIERCE Heidi Schreck
MICAH STAAB. Justin Kruger
GENE DINKEL. Adam LeFevre

SPECIAL THANKS

Special thanks to Jerry Patch and Annie MacRae for commissioning the play; Shelley Butler, Kelly Miller, Megan Carter, Tom Bryant and John Glore for being instrumental in its development; Dan Kois for reading everything I write and offering an honest eye; Des Kennedy for tirelessly and brilliantly bringing the thing to life in London; Julie Crosby and Marc Masterson (& Co.) for saying “yes”; Derek Zasky for handling all manner of things both large and small; and Daniella Topol for being both a marvelous director and beloved friend. And to my non-theatre friends in Kansas who first read the play aloud in my living room, Casey and Eric Rohleder, Shala Mills, Darrell Hamlin, Anne Bannister, and Carl Miller, thank you for lending your insight and friendship.

CHARACTERS

SUSAN PIERCE – mid 30s-early 40s, five months pregnant

MICAH STAAB – 16

GENE DINKEL – 60s

SETTING

Plainview, Kansas – a small town in Northwest Kansas

TIME

The present

For Carl who built a house on the prairie with me.

SCENE ONE

(sky)

(Plopped down in the long grass sits a trailer dressed up on the inside as a classroom.)

(Desks scattered about. Curled up posters half-hanging from the walls. A diagram of a cell. The geological timeline.)

(Boxes stack the corners.)

(A teacher's desk, stacked with papers. A vase of wildflowers.)

(On the upstage wall, a series of small, open windows.)

(Beyond the windows, more sky.)

(SUSAN, on her hands and knees, sniffs the floor.)

(MICAHA enters.)

SUSAN. Do you smell that?

MICAHA. What?

SUSAN. THAT.

MICAHA. I'm not sure.

SUSAN. You're not sure?

MICAHA. No.

SUSAN. It's like...a rotten egg or a dirty diaper or...oh my God, it's getting worse.

MICAHA. I don't smell anything.

SUSAN. It's completely overpowering, like I'm standing knee deep in the middle of a field of manure.

MICAHA. Manure.

SUSAN. Yes! Do you smell it now?

MICAH. Sramek's got their replacement herd this morning.

(MICAH closes all the windows.)

SUSAN. Oh my God. It's gone. It's a miracle.

MICAH. Wind was blowing Easterly.

SUSAN. The wind. It was the wind.

MICAH. And the replacement herd.

SUSAN. Replacement?

MICAH. They lost the other one.

(SUSAN starts laughing. Of the inappropriate variety.)

SUSAN. Oh my God. A herd of flying cows. It's so surreal.
Like a Dali painting or something.

(MICAH stares at her blankly.)

Salvador Dali?

(He shakes his head.)

Well. Cows flying. It's very surreal.

MICAH. Til they land.

SUSAN. Right.

MICAH. Stinks a lot worse than manure.

SUSAN. Yes, I can imagine. I'm sorry. You haven't caught me at my best. Pregnancy heightens your sense of smell. I'm usually less...scattered. Micah, right? Third Period. Micah Staab. Is that German?

MICAH. Volga German.

SUSAN. It's like the old Eastern block out here, what with the Germans and the Czechs and the Slavs. *(pause)* So Micah Staab, what can I do for you?

MICAH. I'm a little unclear about something.

SUSAN. Let me guess: the test. I know it scares the dickens out of everyone, the first week of class and all, but it's not a real test. I just need to take stock of what you know, since last year was...

MICAH. It's not the test.

SUSAN. No? Was there something you didn't understand?

MICAH. I'm not sure.

SUSAN. I'd be happy to go over anything with you. God knows it's hard to learn in this environment. It's certainly hard to teach.

MICAH. It is?

SUSAN. Not because of you, no, you guys are amazing, because of this. I mean, for example, this school in Lawrence, they sent us a bunch of microscopes. Generous, right? One for every student. But the slides they sent, they're not labeled. Along with a dozen microscopes, they sent me three hundred unlabeled slides. How, in God's name, am I supposed to teach a unit on cellular biology with unlabeled slides?

MICAH. Make new labels?

SUSAN. Make new labels. It's a reasonable suggestion, really. However, there is the time issue for one, but far more problematic is that I have no idea what I'm looking at!

MICAH. But you're the teacher.

SUSAN. Right! I'm a teacher. Not a scientist. There are hundreds of slides: onion cells, nerve cells, bacteria, what I believe to be the stem of a leaf but what leaf? I have no idea. I need labels. Don't worry. We have a couple of weeks before we get to cells. I'll figure something out. I'm on the job, boss! So what didn't you understand?

MICAH. It's not that I didn't understand. I'm confused about something you said.

SUSAN. And it's okay to be confused. You can ask me anything. This is a safe place.

(A loud searing tornado warning siren erupts from outside.)

SUSAN. Jesus Christ!

(Without hesitation, MICAH dives underneath SUSAN's desk. He clutches his knees to his chest, hands over his tucked head, trembling.)

(SUSAN just stands there paralyzed for a beat, until she remembers:)

SUSAN. *(cont.)* It's a test.

(She awkwardly gets down on her hands and knees and crawls towards MICAH underneath the desk.)

It's okay, honey. It's the first Thursday of the month.
It's just a test. It's okay.

(SUSAN crouches beside him, her hand lightly resting on his shoulders until the sirens stop.)

See, there? They've stopped. First Thursday of the month. Everything's fine. Micah, honey?

(He's not moving from his crouched position. SUSAN takes him though a relaxation exercise. It's strangely intimate. During the exercise, MICAH slowly unfolds himself. It should take awhile.)

Listen to me, Micah.

I want you to breathe in—

And out

Just concentrate on breathing

In

That's good

And out

Good

Keep breathing

In and out

And now, when you breathe out, I want you to let all of the tension out of your feet and into the floor

In and Out

Good

And now your legs

Just let the tension sink away from your legs and into the floor

In and Out

Now your hips

Let it all fall out of you
And your stomach
Your chest
Arms
Neck
Head

(By now, MICAH is lying supine on the floor.)

(SUSAN crawls out from beneath the desk. She goes to the window and looks out.)

(Music. Something somber. Something a high school band would play. Maybe Taps?)

(It awakens MICAH. He sits up.)

MICAH. What is that?

SUSAN. The dedication outside. They're planting the, you know, whatitscalled, the new row of Cedars along the drive.

MICAH. The windbreak.

SUSAN. Right. The windbreak. Feel better?

MICAH. That was weird. How'd you learn to do that?

SUSAN. I took a bunch of yoga in another life. *(pause)*
Where were you when it hit?

MICAH. The farm.

SUSAN. Is it...?

(MICAH shakes his head)

I'm so very sorry. If you want to talk...

MICAH. No.

SUSAN. I'm here.

(pause)

MICAH. Why did you come?

SUSAN. I'm sorry?

MICAH. Why did you come to Plainview?

SUSAN. To lend a hand.

MICAH. Why?

SUSAN. Haven't you ever looked at photographs after a tsunami or an earthquake half-way across the world and thought, if only I could do something?

MICAH. Yeah. I get that.

SUSAN. You do?

MICAH. Yeah.

SUSAN. Great! So yes, that impulse, that's what brought me here. Although it's yet to be seen if it's going to do any good.

MICAH. But why here?

SUSAN. I'm sorry?

MICAH. Why did you come here instead of like, some other messed up place.

SUSAN. I guess the other half of the story is that things weren't going well for me in New York, neither professionally nor personally – especially personally – and so instead of finishing my certification there, I signed up for Rural Corps, so I could get certified and have health insurance at the same time. Imagine that? They assigned me here.

MICAH. So you didn't, like, choose here. Specifically.

SUSAN. No, but I was happy to come.

MICAH. Oh yeah?

SUSAN. Yes. You don't believe me?

MICAH. Most people who aren't from here don't want to come here.

SUSAN. Well, that may have been true at first. Plainview is at least thirteen hundred miles away from anyone I know. But as I drove into town off of I-70 and saw the flint hills melt away and the town grow straight out of the dirt. There was something about it, even with all the destruction. Sky. Lightness. I thought, this will be the perfect place to start over.

MICAH. Start over from what?

SUSAN. From...that's kind of personal, actually. I'm not comfortable talking about it with a student.

MICAH. Okay.

SUSAN. But I hope you feel comfortable talking to me. I mean, you can tell me anything that's concerning you about school or...you know, there are other people you could talk to, if you're uncomfortable. The school counselor. What's her name? Marcia something?

MICAH. Ms. Kelch. She used to own Plainview Drugs.

SUSAN. When did she become the counselor?

MICAH. Last week.

SUSAN. Well I'm sure she's qualified. I mean, they don't just appoint school counselors willy nilly do they? Do they?

MICAH. She got a degree in psychology from Fort Hays State forty years ago.

SUSAN. Then we're lucky the field of psychology hasn't changed much in forty years, aren't we? My God, what are any of us doing here? Would you like a ride home?

MICAH. Why?

SUSAN. It's been a long day, for you. I imagine. Let me give you a ride. Where do you live?

MICAH. I stay at the Dinkle's.

SUSAN. As in Cade Dinkle, third period?

MICAH. No, he's their nephew. But it's close. I can walk.

SUSAN. If that's what you'd prefer.

MICAH. Yeah. So. See 'ya.

(He picks up his backpack and heads for the door.)

SUSAN. Yes. Tomorrow. Third period.

(MICAH opens the door and steps outside. Wind.)

Jesus H. Fucking Christ That Smell!

(MICAH steps back in.)

Oh God. I'm sorry. It just slipped out. I admit, in that other life I mentioned, I cursed like a sailor. I'm trying to quit, I am. I'm on the patch. You don't look so good. Are you sure you're okay?

MICAH. Yeah. I think.

SUSAN. Maybe I should take you home.

MICAH. No, it's just. That thing I wanted to talk to you about? I think I should go ahead.

SUSAN. By all means. I don't have anywhere to be. I just thought you might. Sit, please sit down. Let's talk. What did you want to ask me?

MICAH. Today in class. You were talking about how life on Earth...how life on Earth began.

SUSAN. That's right.

MICAH. I need my notes.

SUSAN. By all means.

(MICAH pulls out his notes from his backpack.)

MICAH. I have it right here. You said, "the leap from non-life to life is the greatest gap in scientific theories of the Earth's early history."

SUSAN. Yes, I was talking about abiogenesis, how life on Earth could have risen from inanimate matter.

MICAH. What you said about the gap? That's in the book too. I highlighted it.

SUSAN. Good to know someone's reading.

MICAH. But then you said, "unless, of course, you believe in all that other gobbledy gook."

SUSAN. Gobbledy gook.

MICAH. Yeah. That's not in the book.

SUSAN. No, I don't imagine it is. *(pause)* That doesn't sound like something I'd say.

MICAH. I wrote it down.

SUSAN. You did?

MICAH. Yeah.

SUSAN. You must have misheard me. I probably said something that sounded like gobbledy gook.

MICAH. Like what?

(Pause. SUSAN can't think of a single coherent phrase that sounds remotely like gobbledy gook. Can anyone?)

SUSAN. I don't know, Micah. It just doesn't sound like me.

MICAH. It means gibberish. I looked it up.

SUSAN. I know what it means, but it's not something I'd say.

MICAH. Except. You said it in third period.

SUSAN. I'll grant you: sometimes things just fall out of my mouth willy nilly, as you've observed, but the phrase gobbledy gook is not, you know, part of my vocabulary.

MICAH. Do you think I'm lying?

SUSAN. No. God no. I just think we have a little misunderstanding.

MICAH. You said, "unless, of course, you believe in all that other gobbledy gook."

SUSAN. I'm sorry, Micah. You must have misheard me. Is that all you wanted to talk about?

MICAH. So you're saying there's no way you said "unless, of course, you believe in all that other gobbledy gook."

(pause)

SUSAN. Yes. That's what I'm saying.

MICAH. You know Helen Garrett? She's in third period, too. She has red hair.

SUSAN. Yes, I know Helen.

MICAH. She said you said it too.

SUSAN. She did.

MICAH. Yeah. And Cade Dinkel. He heard it. We could call them, if you want.

SUSAN. That won't be necessary. If you all thought I said gobbledy gook, then I guess it's conceivable I'm not remembering the moment exactly, but suffice it to say: I certainly didn't mean it.

MICAH. Mean what?

SUSAN. I didn't mean to use the phrase.

MICAH. But then, what did you mean?

SUSAN. I'm not sure I'm following...

MICAH. You said, "the leap from non-life to life is the greatest gap in scientific theories of the Earth's early

history. Unless, of course, you believe in all that other gobbledy gook." What is the other gobbledy gook?

(*pause*)

SUSAN. I must have been referring to earlier scientific explanations.

MICAH. Earlier scientific explanations for the leap from non-life to life.

SUSAN. Yes.

MICAH. Like what?

SUSAN. Well, for example, until the nineteenth century, scientists believed in the theory of...spontaneous generation, but it was disproven by Louis Pasteur and his experiments in the nineteenth century, so I called it gobbledy gook which is admittedly, a silly description of a non-scientific belief. Is that all?

MICAH. No. Before you said...

SUSAN. Yes?

MICAH. You said gobbledy gook meant earlier *scientific* theories.

SUSAN. Right.

MICAH. Then, just now, you said it meant *non-scientific* theories.

SUSAN. I did?

MICAH. Yeah.

SUSAN. I'll take your word for it.

MICAH. So. Which is it?

SUSAN. I'm sorry, I don't understand your question.

MICAH. When you said gobbledy gook, did you mean scientific theories, or non-scientific theories?

(*pause*)

SUSAN. Both.

MICAH. I don't understand.

SUSAN. Well. It's just. Take spontaneous generation, for example. Before the nineteenth century, it was considered a valid scientific theory. But now it's not.

So...whether you call it science depends on the period in which you live. Clearly, this isn't the eighteenth century, so we no longer consider it a valid scientific theory. Therefore, it is a non-scientific theory. But, once upon a time it was. Historically speaking. *(pause)* I can see how it might be confusing for you.

MICAH. I'm not confused.

SUSAN. You're not? I'm sorry...I thought that's why we were having this discussion.

MICAH. You haven't been clear.

SUSAN. Well I'm doing my darndest to clarify things now. Do you understand what I've said so far?

MICAH. No. What's spontaneous generation?

SUSAN. Oh. Right. Ummmm. Spontaneous generation just means that life can be created...spontaneously. Like it is born wholesale...out of nothing.

MICAH. Like in Genesis?

SUSAN. Genesis.

MICAH. The first book in the Bible.

SUSAN. I know what Genesis is.

MICAH. God creating the world out of nothing. That's an example of spontaneous generation, right?

SUSAN. Let's get this straight: I was not talking about God. I am a firm believer in the separation of church and state. There is no God in my classroom. *(catching herself)* I mean, there is no *talk* of God in my classroom.

MICAH. But God creating the world out of nothing. That's an example of spontaneous generation.

SUSAN. That's not what I was talking about.

MICAH. But still. It's an example, right?

SUSAN. You could look at it that way, I guess, but it's not necessarily what early scientists had in mind. I mean, not all early scientists were Christians, right?

MICAH. But were there some?

SUSAN. Some were and some weren't. Did you know that Charles Darwin studied to become a clergyman in the

Anglican church? I just read that somewhere. Most people don't know that about him.

MICAH. Did he believe in spontaneous generation?

SUSAN. No.

MICAH. So you weren't talking about his beliefs.

SUSAN. No.

MICAH. You were talking about people who disagree with Darwin.

SUSAN. Darwin wasn't even born until the nineteenth century, so he's not relevant to the conversation. I shouldn't have brought him up.

MICAH. People always bring him up.

SUSAN. Well he's pretty important.

MICAH. And controversial.

SUSAN. Not to scientists.

MICAH. What about science teachers?

SUSAN. Not to science teachers either.

MICAH. Do you know Mr. Avery?

SUSAN. No.

MICAH. He was the biology teacher before you.

SUSAN. Oh, older, in the ummm...

MICAH. Wheelchair, yeah. He said Darwin was controversial.

SUSAN. Well he's not. And like I said, not really relevant to the conversation. We can talk about Darwin another time, once we've covered the material in class. Why don't you go on home, rest, refresh, and if this is still bothering you tomorrow, we can talk about it then.

MICAH. I just want to make sure I understand.

SUSAN. I think we've been over this enough.

MICAH. When you said gobbledy gook, you were talking about spontaneous generation.

SUSAN. So I've said.

MICAH. And an example of spontaneous generation is God creating the world out of nothing, like in Genesis.

SUSAN. See, this is what I was afraid of.

MICAH. What?

SUSAN. Now you're putting words in my mouth.

MICAH. How?

SUSAN. I never said God creating the world was gobbledy gook.

MICAH. But you said spontaneous generation was a bunch of gobbledy gook, and God creating the world is an example of spontaneous generation.

SUSAN. One example of many.

MICAH. What's another example?

SUSAN. Of spontaneous generation?

MICAH. Yeah.

(pause)

SUSAN. I don't know off the top of my head. I'd have to look it up.

MICAH. So, when you said gobbledy gook, you were thinking of an example of spontaneous generation that you don't know off the top of your head but would have to look up?

SUSAN. Clearly Micah, I wasn't really thinking at all when I said it. I just said it. Okay?

MICAH. Okay.

SUSAN. I think we're done here.

MICAH. I need...

SUSAN. I don't have anything else to say on this topic.

MICAH. I need to say something.

SUSAN. Fine. But I'm not going to argue with you anymore.

MICAH. I don't want that. I just want to understand. I want you to understand.

SUSAN. What?

MICAH. I believe God created the universe. Spontaneously. I believe that's how life began.

SUSAN. Okay. I understand. But can you understand that while you're entitled to your beliefs, they're not appropriate to discuss during biology class?

MICAH. Yes. (*quietly*) Do you?

SUSAN. Excuse me?

MICAH. What you said, about other theories being gobbledy gook? Even if you didn't mean to say it, it was an expression of your beliefs.

SUSAN. Okay. Yes, I called non-scientific theories gobbledy-gook, and you know what, even though I regret the choice of phrasing, in a science classroom, non-scientific theories—however historical or meaningful—are irrelevant. End of story.

MICAH. So, then, you're not sorry?

SUSAN. No.

(MICAH has to work very hard to collect himself, but he does.)

(He exits.)

(SUSAN tries to resume organizing the classroom, but her heart isn't in it.)

(She packs her bag and goes outside, pausing on the steps to look up at the sky.)

(The light changes.)

(Clouds roll out.)

(And the sunset lights the sky:)

(yellow)

(orange)

(pink)

(and blue)

SCENE TWO

(SUSAN sits at her desk, grading papers. The sound of a chain saw startles her. She opens the door to see what's up. GENE is standing there.)

GENE. Hello! Gene Dinkel. Didn't mean to scare you.

SUSAN. Oh hi. Susan Pierce. I was just...I'm sorry, what is that?

GENE. Chainsaw. They're cutting up the Cottonwood that fell in the storm last night.

(The chain saw stops.)

Heard there was a new body in town and thought I'd come by with the welcome wagon. Ruby couldn't make it. Her arthritis is acting up, but she sent her lemon meringue pie in her stead. Don't tell her I said so, but I think you made out better in the bargain.

SUSAN. That's so nice of you. Thank you.

GENE. The meringue alone is worth its weight in gold.

SUSAN. Then it can't be worth much, can it?

GENE. How's that?

SUSAN. Because good meringue is light. So it wouldn't be worth much.

GENE. That's right.

SUSAN. Anyway, everyone here has been so welcoming. Shala Mills dropped off a jar of tomatoes from her garden the other day, and now I have pie. How great is that?

GENE. Glad you're getting a proper welcome, glad to hear it.

SUSAN. It was good meeting you. Thanks for stopping by.

(He walks past her into the trailer.)

GENE. So. This is what passes for the high school these days.

SUSAN. Better than holding classes in a tent, right?

GENE. True, true. Seen the design for the new school?

SUSAN. I have.

GENE. And what did you think?

SUSAN. It seems very...functional.

GENE. Ugly as sin.

SUSAN. I couldn't agree with you more.

GENE. How hard is it to design a good looking building?

SUSAN. I think they were going for cheap.

GENE. Yeah, yeah. That's what happens when your tax base flees. So how's the Glassman property working out for you?

SUSAN. How do you know where I live?

GENE. Ran into Dale Glassman at Daily Doughnuts this morning. Known Dale my whole life, served as an usher at his wedding. He was two hours late for his own wedding, he tell you that?

SUSAN. No.

GENE. Got stuck at the farm with a breached birth. Course we didn't have cell phones back then, so Jan thought he'd gotten a case of cold feet. Was downright hysterical when he arrived at the church covered in blood. We got him washed off and married and that was that. Now here we are thirty years later, they got four grown children, and you're living in their converted barn. Must be quite a culture shock for you.

SUSAN. It's not too bad.

(SUSAN rubs her side a little, wincing.)

GENE. You alright there?

SUSAN. Fine. Just some ligament pain. It's nothing.

GENE. Let me get you a chair, Mrs. Pierce.

SUSAN. No, I'm fine, really. But it's Ms., not Mrs.

GENE. My apologies. What are you: four months? Five?

SUSAN. Five.

GENE. I just assumed.

SUSAN. No. Not married.

GENE. No mister in the picture at all?

SUSAN. He won't be joining me.

GENE. Well let me just say then: I got a lot of admiration for you!

SUSAN. For what?

GENE. For choosing life! Even though you're an unmarried gal. That's a brave choice, and I admire it!

SUSAN. I'm hardly a gal, and I'm not looking for your approval of my personal life one way or the other.

GENE. Did I just stick my foot in it? My apologies. Ruby says I got diarrhea of the mouth, always saying the first thing pops into my head. I meant it as a compliment, but I apologize.

SUSAN. Apology accepted.

GENE. Really?

SUSAN. Well you did bring me pie.

GENE. Thank you *Ms. Pierce*. That's very generous of you.

SUSAN. Just. Call me Susan.

GENE. Will do. And I'm Gene.

SUSAN. So, Gene. What do you do exactly?

GENE. Me? I'm the Plainview post-master. Well, I was until the post office turned to rubble.

Now they've turned me into a committee man. Downtown beautification, emergency relief fund, rebuilding for a better tomorrow!

SUSAN. Sounds like you're keeping busy. Which reminds me, I have a mountain of tests to grade—

GENE. It's rewarding work though. Managed to wrangle up all that Cedar for the senior class at a bargain. Donated from a nursery in Omaha. Noticed you left before the first tree got planted.

SUSAN. I had lessons to prepare.

GENE. Of course you did. Did you know the old windbreak was planted by the WPA during the Dust Bowl?

SUSAN. Yes, I did, in fact, I read about it.

GENE. You read about it?

SUSAN. Yes.

GENE. My Daddy helped plant it. 1936.

SUSAN. Is that right?

GENE. Felt like history was being made again. Proud to be a part of that. Very proud. Too bad you had to leave.

SUSAN. Yes, as I said, lesson plans.

GENE. Important to show unified support for the kids though, don't you think? In times like these?

SUSAN. Forgive me, but are you a parent?

GENE. Me and Ruby been looking after Micah Staab since the spring.

SUSAN. Micah Staab.

GENE. Yes ma'am.

SUSAN. That's right. He mentioned something. Are you his guardian?

GENE. Not legally. He's got an uncle down in Hutch, but he stayed on with us. Didn't care to leave town.

SUSAN. What happened to Micah's parents, if you don't mind my asking?

GENE. Not at all. His mother Rachel died a couple of years back, some kind of woman's cancer. His step-father Terry was one of the seventeen. Didn't make it to the basement in time.

SUSAN. Oh God. I'm so sorry to hear that.

GENE. Me too. I admit, Terry wasn't my cup of tea, he wasn't anybody's cup of tea, but it's always tragic to see a man cut down in his prime.

SUSAN. You know, it's fortuitous, you stopping by, actually.

GENE. It is?

SUSAN. Yes. I've been meaning to get in touch with Micah's parents or guardian, but as you can see, I've been swamped. I've been worried about Micah. He seems distracted and maybe even a little anxious.

GENE. You think he's anxious?

SUSAN. I'm not a counselor, but he does seem troubled.

GENE. I've noticed that too.

SUSAN. You have?

GENE. Yes. In fact, the other day, I stopped in on my brother, R.C. Wanted to check out his new trailer. R.C.'s got a boy in your class too. Cade. Brown hair, freckles—

SUSAN. Yes, I know Cade.

GENE. Anyhoo, Cade told me Micah was real troubled by something you said in class.

SUSAN. Let me assure you, that was just a misunderstanding. Micah and I cleared it up.

GENE. You did?

SUSAN. Yes. He spoke to me after class, and we resolved everything.

GENE. That's funny. Cade didn't seem to think so.

SUSAN. Cade wasn't there.

GENE. Huh. I thought Cade was in your class too.

SUSAN. I meant, afterwards. He wasn't with Micah and me afterwards.

GENE. Maybe not, but when I asked Micah about the incident, he still seemed pretty upset.

SUSAN. Have you considered taking Micah to see a therapist? I think he could really use someone to talk to right now.

GENE. Oh we don't need to go to all that trouble now. He's upset you called belief in God a bunch of gobbledy gook, but I don't think he needs to go to therapy over it, do you?

SUSAN. That is not what I said.

GENE. I'm afraid that's the way the students heard it.

SUSAN. You mean Micah.

GENE. Now I don't want to start rumors or get anybody in trouble. I talked to several of your students about the incident, and they all came away from it feeling you had disrespected their beliefs.

SUSAN. Several of my students? Who else did you speak to besides Cade and Micah?

GENE. Like I said, I'm not here to get anybody in trouble.

SUSAN. I think I have a right to know who exactly is accusing me of what.

GENE. Let's not get carried away. I'm not looking to kick up a bunch of dust over this thing. I just want to nip it in the bud.

SUSAN. Me too, but if you're looking for some sort of admission of guilt, then I can assure you, you've come knocking at the wrong door. I did not call belief in God a bunch of gobbledy gook. Now if you'll excuse me, I have papers to grade.

GENE. Now let me show you something here.

(GENE *produces* MICAH's notebook.)

SUSAN. What's this?

GENE. Micah's notes. He wrote down your words verbatim, and Cade, he's confirmed them.

SUSAN. You know what? I'm no longer comfortable having this conversation with you.

GENE. A child's notebook makes you uncomfortable?

SUSAN. No, not the notebook. Your insinuations make me uncomfortable. If you want to discuss what I did or did not say, then we need to continue this conversation with Shirley.

GENE. Now Susan, are you sending me to the principal's office?

SUSAN. No, I just think this conversation needs to be mediated.

GENE. Why? I'm just a concerned parent is all. Concerned parents and teachers meet all the time. Isn't that why we're having this meeting?

SUSAN. Meeting? We're calling this a meeting now? I thought you just came by to bring me pie.

GENE. I did, I did. I also wanted to speak to you about Micah.

SUSAN. Then you should have scheduled a meeting to talk about Micah, instead of ambushing me with a student's notebook and a bunch of hearsay.

GENE. Maybe I haven't gone about this the right way.

SUSAN. No, you haven't. In fact, I'm unclear as to what right you have to be here at all. You aren't Micah's father. You aren't his legal guardian. If you want to have a parent-teacher conference, then I suggest you get in touch with Micah's Uncle down in Hutch. And if he has any concerns, *he* can schedule a meeting. Have a good day.

GENE. I know I don't have legal claim on Micah's well-being. Maybe I haven't filled out all the proper paperwork.

SUSAN. No you haven't. Good day.

GENE. But then, neither have you.

SUSAN. Excuse me?

GENE. You're not a certified teacher, right?

SUSAN. I have a degree from Brooklyn College. Everyone from the principal to the school board has approved my appointment.

GENE. But you haven't fulfilled every requirement. You don't have the certification.

SUSAN. Certification isn't a piece of paper you frame and nail to the wall and then presto, all of a sudden you have the right to teach a classroom full of students. It's a process, and my position here is part of that process. If you have a problem with my resume, then by all means take it up with Shirley, although I assure you, she is thrilled to have someone with my academic background, instead of some recent community college graduate who thinks the earth is three thousand years old!

GENE. Six.

SUSAN. Excuse me?

GENE. Young earth creationists believe the earth is at least six thousand years old. It's calculated from the genealogies in the Bible.

SUSAN. I stand corrected. Clearly, you know more about it than I do! Ugh....

(SUSAN doubles over in pain. She grabs the side of a desk.)

GENE. You okay? What's wrong?

SUSAN. Just. Give me a minute.

GENE. Do you want me to call the doctor? I got a phone in the truck.

SUSAN. No, no. It's the ligament pain. I've been having it all week.

GENE. Let me get you a chair.

SUSAN. No thank you. I'll be fine in a minute. Just give me some space.

(GENE gets a chair and brings it up behind her.)

GENE. Here you go. Sit down.

SUSAN. What did I just say?

GENE. I heard you. Now stop yammering and sit down!

(She does. GENE gets another chair and places it in front of her.)

For your feet. You have a sweater or something?

SUSAN. At my desk.

(GENE retrieves her sweater and folds it neatly.)

GENE. Sit up for a sec.

(He places the sweater behind her back.)

Now just relax.

(she does)

(The chainsaw roars.)

(They laugh a little, until the chainsaw subsides.)

SUSAN. I hope they don't keep that up all afternoon.

GENE. Me too. Feel better?

SUSAN. Yes, actually.

GENE. Good. That's what I like to hear.

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