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Kindness

by Adam Rapp

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION



NEW YORK HOLLYWOOD LONDON TORONTO

SAMUELFRENCH.COM

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Playwrights Horizons, Inc.,
produced the world premiere of *KINDNESS*
Off-Broadway in 2008

KINDNESS premiered at Playwrights Horizons (Tim Sanford, artistic director) at the Peter J. Sharp Theater on Oct. 13, 2008. The performance was directed by Adam Rapp, with sets by Lauren Helpert, costumes by Daphne Javitch, lighting by Mary Louise Geiger, and sound, by Eric Shim. The production stage manager was Richard A. Hodge. The cast was as follows:

DENNIS Christopher Denham
MARYANNE Annette O'Toole
HERMAN Ray Anthony Thomas
FRANCES Katherine Waterston

CHARACTERS

Dennis
Maryanne
Herman
Frances

ACT ONE

(In the dark we hear classic porn music. We also hear a boy's voice and heavy breathing.)

*(Lights up on a Midtown Manhattan Hotel Room. Two full beds, a small nightstand with a drawer between the beds, family photos on the nightstand. A curtained window. A table with a phone. A door leading to a bathroom. Next to a closet, a large desk-like table with a phone. A swivel chair pushed into the table. Over one of the beds, a large framed photo of Central Park's 107th Infantry Memorial statue hanging on the wall. An overstuffed chair positioned toward a large armoire containing a TV. On the shelf below the TV, a stuffed monkey, a Statue of Liberty paperweight and a few souvenir spoons. On the TV, two women are naked, dancing, and sharing an apple. Seated in the overstuffed chair and masturbating as if his life depends on it is **DENNIS**, 17. He is white, thin, pasty, boyishly handsome. He sports a short military academy hair cut, though it is not a crew cut, and wears Adidas basketball warm-up pants, high top basketball sneakers, and a hoody. His sweat pants are down at his ankles and he is nearing completion. He counts down from ten. Near blast-off he cries "I'm coming! I'm coming! Mohammed Ali!" The front door opens. **DENNIS** grabs the first thing he can find, covers his lap, and orgasms thoroughly. His mother, **MARYANNE**, late forties, a little out of breath, somehow lost, walks in. She walks with a cane. Somehow **DENNIS** switches the channel on the TV. An excruciatingly embarrassing situation for him, though it doesn't quite register with **MARYANNE**.)*

DENNIS. Ma!

MARYANNE. Were you just callin my name, Dennis?

DENNIS. What?! No!

MARYANNE. Are you sure?

DENNIS. I wasn't callin your name.

MARYANNE. Well, that's strange. I coulda sworn I heard you really callin out to me. I thought maybe there was some sorta terrible crisis...Whatcha wathcin?

DENNIS. What's it look like I'm watchin?

MARYANNE. A friggin Lucky Charms commercial, don't be a smart-ass.

DENNIS. I'm watchin the Knicks.

MARYANNE. Who are they playin?

DENNIS. Orlando.

MARYANNE. Whose winnin?

DENNIS. It's still in the first quarter. What are you doin back?

MARYANNE. I forgot my jacket. It suddenly got so chilly. You haven't seen it, have you? The baby blue windbreaker with the little goose on the front – the one your Aunt Billy got me for my birthday?

(He looks to his lap and realizes that he has climaxed into the very jacket.)

MARYANNE. I coulda sworn I left it in here.

(While she looks for it, DENNIS manages to pull his pants up and wedges the blue jacket between him and the side of the chair. She sits in the swivel chair.)

MARYANNE. I'm so out of breath all of the sudden.

DENNIS. Well, you know what Dr. Baron said.

MARYANNE. Oh, Dr. Baron can go jump in a lake.

DENNIS. That's mature.

MARYANNE. I'm tired of Dr. Baron. That breath of his. Those hairy ears.

DENNIS. *(turning the TV off)* You're sposed to be takin it easy.

MARYANNE. I started walkin up Seventh Avenue and I was doin pretty good. Boy, New York sure is a whirlwind of a city, Dennis. All the lights. The billboards. They got

these buses that are about as long as a football field. Two, three buses all linked together. And so many people on the street. I saw a man wearin nothin but his underwear and a cowboy hat. No socks even. Some chest on that guy, too. The chest of a bullfighter. A bullfighter or maybe some typa athlete. I got all the way to Forty-Second Street when I realized I forgot my jacket.

DENNIS. You walked back?

MARYANNE. I took a cab. I had the nicest driver, too, Dennis. Just the nicest man. Struck up a conversation with me right away, askin where I'm from, was it my first time here, etcetera, etcetera. You hear about these New York City cabs with the prostitutes and unsavory types doin business in the backseat and such. This was the complete opposite of that, Dennis. The guy didn't even charge me the fare. I went to swipe my debit card in the transaction thingy and he stops me cold and says it's on the house.

DENNIS. Who was he, a priest?

MARYANNE. He was just a regular type guy. As regular as they come. He's actually waitin for me downstairs.

DENNIS. He is?

MARYANNE. He's double-parked with his hazards on, I kid you not.

DENNIS. Why?

MARYANNE. Well, I started talkin about the play and it turns out the poor guy hasn't ever seen a Broadway musical. Lived here all his life and not one musical – imagine that. That's like livin next to the aquarium and never knowin what an octopus looks like. An octopus or a barracuda or whathaveyou. And he said he's always wanted to see this particular musical cause of how he gets so many post-show fares at that exact theater and how his customers are all aglow and inspired and hummin the songs. He even knows about the subject matter and such. We talked about the themes and how they relate to life. Survivin in the streets –

DENNIS. (*smartass*) Survivin'!: *The Musical*.

MARYANNE. (*pressing on, firm*) And meetin your soul mate and the quest for human connection and dealin with bad news. And he showed genuine concern and a true depth of curiosity, Dennis. We even talked about what constitutes a good love song. I mean, in a matter of four-five blocks we had just the nicest conversation.

DENNIS. What's his name?

MARYANNE. Herman.

DENNIS. *Herman*?

MARYANNE. Yeah, what's wrong with Herman?

DENNIS. It sounds like some old guy with hemorrhoids.

MARYANNE. Hemorrhoids. You don't even know what hemorrhoids are.

DENNIS. Yes I do.

MARYANNE. Oh yeah? What are they?

DENNIS. It's when your jazzhole puckers.

MARYANNE. Your *who*?

DENNIS. Your jazzhole.

MARYANNE. What the heck is a jazzhole?

DENNIS. A jazzhole's a anus.

MARYANNE. Dennis, that's not what hemorrhoids are.

DENNIS. It is too, Ma. It's when your jazzhole puckers and you crap projectile blood. My history teacher at school has em.

MARYANNE. What history teacher?

DENNIS. Sergeant Dietz. He has hemorrhoids and herpes on his lips and he grows a mustache to try and hide it.

MARYANNE. To hide his hemorrhoids or his herpes?

DENNIS. His herpes. They're all over his upper lip.

MARYANNE. Well, that's disgusting.

DENNIS. His mustache isn't even regulation but the Commandant lets him grow it out cause it's so gross.

MARYANNE. Well, they should give him some cortisone or a special cream or somethin. God, what a mess *he* sounds like. And just for the record, smart guy, hemorrhoids are when your intestines get irritated and start pressin through your backside.

DENNIS. Same difference.

MARYANNE. It's not the same difference. It's your intestines that get irritated, not your friggin jazzthingy.

DENNIS. *Jazzhole*.

MARYANNE. *Jazzhole*. Where the heck do you come up with these phrases anyway? You and your lingo. What was it you called that nice lady at the desk, a skizzle?

DENNIS. Skeezer.

MARYANNE. Yeah, whatever that means.

DENNIS. It's classic Hi-hop, Yo.

MARYANNE. Oh, go Yo yourself.

DENNIS. A skeezer's a well-appointed woman.

MARYANNE. Yeah, a well-appointed *somethin*...Dennis, you can't go around callin people names, especially in public.

DENNIS. She didn't hear me.

MARYANNE. You don't know that for certain. And she was overweight, too.

DENNIS. What does that have to do with anything?

MARYANNE. Well, you coulda really hurt that poor woman's feelings. It's not easy for the obese. Especially these days with everyone bein so thin and attracted to themselves and all. The obese and the homeless – they're the ones who have it roughest.

DENNIS. Fine. I'm a terrible person. Shoot me in the mouth.

MARYANNE. Oh, you are not a terrible person. And stop sayin that.

DENNIS. Take me out back and shoot me in the mouth. Bust a cap in my ass.

MARYANNE. Hemorrhoids concern your intestines and you get em because of lack of fiber.

DENNIS. Yeah, you know everything.

MARYANNE. I certainly know more than you on the subject, that's for sure. Have you ever had hemorrhoids?

DENNIS. No.

MARYANNE. Well, I did. In fact, I had em when I was carryin you, Mister Classic Hip-Hop Lingo Stud Champion. I had em all through my final trimester and it's no walk in the park, let me tell you.

DENNIS. I'm sorry I ruined your perfect life.

MARYANNE. Oh, stop being dramatic. Anyway, Herman's not some old guy with hemorrhoids. In fact I might even wager that he's younger than the bag of hammers that sits before you.

DENNIS. You're not a bag of hammers.

MARYANNE. You taken a good look at me lately?

DENNIS. You look better than when you were doin chemo.

MARYANNE. I don't even know if that's true, I really don't.

(She stops suddenly doubles over in pain. She crosses to the table, brings a wadded tissue to her mouth.)

DENNIS. You okay?

(There is blood in her tissue.)

DENNIS. Maybe you should lay down.

MARYANNE. I'm fine.

(DENNIS crosses to the bathroom, exits, returns with a glass of water and a hand towel.)

DENNIS. You want the Pedialyte?

(She shakes her head. DENNIS crosses to the bed closest to the window, hurls himself on to it, face-down.)

DENNIS. So you're gonna take this guy to the play?

MARYANNE. Well, that's sorta what I wanted to discuss with you – the other ticket bein yours originally.

DENNIS. You want me to clear outta here later so you can have some privacy?

MARYANNE. Now, that's ridiculous. We'd be goin as friends.

DENNIS. He's takin you in his cab?

MARYANNE. Sure.

DENNIS. Classy.

MARYANNE. Whattaya mean, classy.

DENNIS. You're gonna roll up in a *cab*?

MARYANNE. A car's a friggin car – what the heck do I care?

Since when did you become such a snob, anyway?

Boy...

DENNIS. Did he ask you about your cane?

MARYANNE. I told him I have a bad ankle. I said I banged it.

DENNIS. On what?

MARYANNE. On your generally bad attitude.

DENNIS. Hardy-har.

MARYANNE. Oh, hardy-har yourself.

DENNIS. Ma, this is how people get chopped up and stuffed
inna suitcase. Especially in this city.

MARYANNE. Well, that's certainly grim. You've seen too
many movies.

DENNIS. What movies?

MARYANNE. You know what movies. The ones with all those
moody Italians and their hysterical girlfriends. The
movies by Martin Scorsese and Yancy Tarantino or
whatever his name is.

DENNIS. Quentin.

MARYANNE. Yeah, Quentin Tarantino – the thugmeister
himself.

DENNIS. He's not a thug, Ma. He's a regular guy. He used
to work as a clerk in a video store.

MARYANNE. Oh, yeah, sure – a video clerk. That's what
they'd *like* you to believe.

DENNIS. They meanin...

MARYANNE. They meanin they.

DENNIS. Qualify your pronouns please.

MARYANNE. I'll qualify somethin, all right. Get your shoes
off the bed. That's where I'm sleepin!

(DENNIS raises his shoes up playfully, then eventually sits up, placing his feet on the floor. He opens and closes the drawer to the bedside table a few times, then stops. Over the following, he gently knocks all the family photos down:)

MARYANNE. For the record I just wanna say one more time how much I wanted you to see this play with me. I mean, what the heck, kiddo, we flew all the way out here, spent all of Grandpa Shoe's money on the hotel package. This nice landmark hotel. And I got you your sweat suit and we had such a nice day at Macy's and at the library and walkin around Bryant P – put those back!

(DENNIS rights the picture frames.)

MARYANNE. You promised you would come.

DENNIS. You bribed me.

MARYANNE. How did I bribe you?

DENNIS. By buyin me the sweatsuit.

MARYANNE. Dennis, I bought you the sweatsuit cause you got your grades up.

DENNIS. But you couldn't stop talkin about the play while we were in line for the register.

MARYANNE. Cause I was excited!

DENNIS. And now you're usin it against me so here...

(He removes the bottoms, throws them on the floor next to him, then goes into his travel bag, removes the top, throws that on the floor as well.)

DENNIS. Return it.

MARYANNE. Maybe I don't wanna return it.

DENNIS. Well, now I don't want it.

MARYANNE. Well, I don't want it either, so...

DENNIS. So what?

MARYANNE. So nothin, you got no pants on.

(A stale mate for a bit.)

MARYANNE. Look at the sticks on that guy.

(DENNIS *doesn't respond.*)

MARYANNE. You got some nice legs there, bub. I'll bet you're a ball player. How's your vertical leap? You the new white Jordan everyone's talkin about? The high-flyin Marzipan man?

(*He says nothing.*)

MARYANNE. Well, at least put your pants back on.

(*He doesn't.*)

MARYANNE. I guess I'll just have to stare at your sexy gams. The hams, the gams and the shanks, that's where the money's at.

DENNIS. Okay, Dad.

MARYANNE. Your father learned that one from me.

DENNIS. Uh-huh.

MARYANNE. He did. He learned it from me cause your Uncle Stags used to say it to your grandma to tease her...I wonder where the oaf is right now, anyway. What the heck he's up to.

DENNIS. Who, Uncle Stags?

MARYANNE. Your father.

DENNIS. You know what he's up to.

MARYANNE. Maybe he's figurin some things out.

DENNIS. (*sitting on his bed, putting his pants back on*) Ma, he's prolly at a casino, and you *know* he's prolly at a casino. Sittin around some Caribbean Stud table, wishin he had enough money for the V.I.P room.

MARYANNE. Sandy Baranowski saw him at the Harrah's in Joliet and she said he mostly plays Roulette now. Roulette and Let it Ride.

DENNIS. Loser.

MARYANNE. Don't talk that way about your father. Even if he made some mistakes, he's still your father.

(*A pause. He puts his pants back on. She sits next to him on the bed.*)

MARYANNE. Dennis, at home when we listened to the CD you said you liked the play.

DENNIS. I was lyin.

MARYANNE. I sat with you at the kitchen table and you started tappin your foot and you got goosebumps on your arm.

DENNIS. I got goosebumps cause I was so embarrassed for you.

MARYANNE. Oh you were not. You got legitimate Hollywood chills and your eyes did that thing they do when you're emotional. Especially when the young couple started singin that song about the snow and how the ingénue wanted to cover her loverboy with that homemade blanket of cigarette cartons and dishrags. And when the homosexual electronics genius and the Latino drag queen do the kung fu love rap you laughed your head off.

DENNIS. I did not.

MARYANNE. You did too, Dennis. We both laughed our heads off, actually, cause it was funny.

DENNIS. Cause it was stupid.

MARYANNE. It was funny. In fact, you were the first one who laughed – Aunt Billy as my witness. It was genuinely comedic and you know it...Dennis?

DENNIS. What.

MARYANNE. We don't know how much time I got left, you know?

DENNIS. Don't be so fuckin morbid.

(She slaps him hard. He rises, crosses to the window, holding his face.)

MARYANNE. Oh, honey, I didn't mean to do that.

DENNIS. Yeah, right.

(She rises, crosses to him.)

MARYANNE. I didn't, I really didn't.

DENNIS. *(turning to her)* Sometimes I wish you would just die and get it over with.

(She moves to touch him. He leans away, crosses to the closet, enters, closing the closet behind him.)

MARYANNE. I realize you're angry. I'm sorry. Dennis...

(no response)

MARYANNE. Dennis, please...

(no response)

MARYANNE. I wish we could be kinder to each other, you know? Figure out some way to...I realize this hasn't been easy on you. You've been so brave.

DENNIS. *(from inside the closet)* Just take your new lover to the play, okay?

MARYANNE. He's not my new lover.

DENNIS. *(from inside the closet)* Whatever.

MARYANNE. You should come down and say hello. Just to make sure he doesn't have an axe under his dashboard. Or any suspicious-lookin suitcases floatin around.

DENNIS. *(from inside the closet)* No thanks.

MARYANNE. Well, don't say I didn't try. I guess you can just stay in the closet and not experience life!

(She quickly crosses to the bathroom, closes the door. The sound of the radio. Moments later we hear her vomiting.)

(DENNIS enters from the closet, quickly crosses to the chair, removes the jacket from under the cushion, quickly mashes the inside of the jacket together, squeezes it into a ball and arranges in the corner by the table.)

(A sharp cry of pain from the bathroom, then only the radio. DENNIS slowly crosses to the bathroom door, puts his hand on it.)

DENNIS. Ma, you okay?...Ma?

(The radio is turned off. She opens the bathroom door.)

MARYANNE. Will you get me my cane?

(He gets her cane, hands it to her.)

DENNIS. Maybe you should stay in.

MARYANNE. No, I'm gonna go. (*spotting her jacket*) There it is.

(*She crosses to the jacket, bends down for it, can't quite reach it. DENNIS moves to help her.*)

MARYANNE. I got it.

(*She manages to get it, puts it on, crosses to her purse, takes out a twenty, offers it.*)

MARYANNE. In case you want a Starbucks or somethin.

(*DENNIS takes it, keeps looking at her.*)

MARYANNE. What.

DENNIS. Your lipstick.

MARYANNE. What wrong with it? Is it too much?

DENNIS. You look like a corpse.

(*She dabs her lips with a tissue.*)

MARYANNE. Is that better?

(*DENNIS nods.*)

MARYANNE. So I guess I'll see you later, then. Gimme a hug, huh?

(*He hugs her. She crosses to the front door. DENNIS moves to open it for her. She exits. After the door closes, DENNIS, drops to his knees, cries for a moment, slaps himself in the face, punches himself in the legs, gets himself together, crosses to the bedside table, takes her bottle of pain medication, removes the top, takes a pill, then exits the room, leaving the door open. He returns moments later with a bucket of ice, exits again, leaving the door open. A young woman enters, looks around, a little on edge. She is well dressed, haute couture, heels. DENNIS' cell phone rings a few times. She spots it, picks it up, doesn't answer, sets it down just as DENNIS enters with three cans of Coke Classic.*)

FRANCES. Hey.

DENNIS. Hey.

FRANCES. Is that your cell phone?

DENNIS. Yeah.

FRANCES. It was just ringing.

(He does not cross to it.)

FRANCES. I just saw you down by the ice machine. I waved hello, did you see me?

DENNIS. No.

FRANCES. I thought that boy's either rude or he's blind.

DENNIS. I'm not blind.

FRANCES. Full-blown wave.

(He checks the bathroom, the closet.)

FRANCES. I normally wouldn't just invite myself in.

DENNIS. But you did.

FRANCES. Well, you seemed like a nice guy. From a distance at least. In your Run DMC sweats and Supersize hoody. Are you a nice guy?

DENNIS. Who are you?

FRANCES. Just a girl who's all dressed up with nowhere to go. Can I ask you a question?

(He doesn't answer.)

FRANCES. Well I will anyway. What's a kid like you doing holed up in New York City hotel room on a Saturday night?

DENNIS. Who said I was holed up?

FRANCES. Oh, so he *chooses* solitude. So independent.

DENNIS. What are you doin in my room?

FRANCES. That's a good question. I was just...I don't know. I actually have no idea why I'm in your room. I walked in. Sometimes life is like a river and you have to do all you can to avoid the piranhas, right? But while we're on the subject, would you mind if I hung out with you for a little while? I'm harmless, I promise. And speaking of rivers I'm a swimming conversationalist, I really am.

DENNIS. What do you mean, a kid like me?

FRANCES. I don't follow.

DENNIS. Before you asked why a kid like me's –

FRANCES. I guess you just don't seem like a shut-in.

DENNIS. What do I seem like?

FRANCES. A mover. A shaker. A stuffin of mudliness.

DENNIS. A mud stuffin?

FRANCES. Exactly. What were you doing at the ice machine, anyway?

DENNIS. Getting ice.

FRANCES. For what?

DENNIS. Cooling purposes.

FRANCES. Nice. First time in New York? I only ask because along with your natural virility you possess a skosh of that don't stab me my skin breaks easily look.

DENNIS. *Skosh?*

FRANCES. Let's start over, shall we? Hi, I just saw you in the hall a few minutes ago. You were getting ice out of the ice machine. My name is Frances.

(She approaches him, extends her hand. He drops a can of Coke, picks it up. They shake.)

FRANCES. And you're...

DENNIS. Dennis.

FRANCES. You look like a Dennis. A Dennis or a Nick. By the way, Dennis, is there anything to drink around here, besides Coca-Cola Classic?

(DENNIS crosses to his gym bag, pulls out a bottle of whiskey.)

FRANCES. Jackpot music. Where'd you score that?

DENNIS. This dude down by the front desk hooked me up.

FRANCES. Tall, storkish-looking guy with a long skinny face? Balding? Big fake white teeth?

DENNIS. Yeah.

FRANCES. That's Creepy Chris. He apparently won the teeth at a poker game. He pretends he works at the hotel. He sort of hangs out in the lobby and wears the bellboy uni. Be careful of him, his hands tend to wander.

DENNIS. Whoa.

FRANCES. How old are you, Dennis?

DENNIS. Um, old...I'm seventeen.

FRANCES. Seventeen but you still get fucked up like the rest of America? Sit down I'll make us some drinks.

(She takes the bottle, opens a Coke, puts ice in glasses, makes Jack and Cokes. He sits in the overstuffed chair.)

FRANCES. Who was that woman who left a few minutes ago?

DENNIS. My mom.

FRANCES. Where was she going?

DENNIS. To a play.

FRANCES. Which one?

DENNIS. That famous one where everyone's dyin.

FRANCES. The musical of all musicals? Everyone's dying and falling in love and freezing to death and singing about it?

DENNIS. Survivin.

FRANCES. *Survivin!* Call Telecharge, blah blah, blah. There's a movie now.

DENNIS. Yeah, don't remind me.

FRANCES. She seemed stressed.

DENNIS. *(standing)* Were you like spyin on our room or somethin?

FRANCES. Me? A spy? God, no. What would I be spying on, anyway?

DENNIS. Not much. Boredom. Stupidity.

FRANCES. Siddown, sailor.

(He sits.)

FRANCES. So, it's that bad, huh? Why does she have a cane?

DENNIS. Bad ankle.

(She hands him a drink.)

FRANCES. To boredom and stupidity. Cheers.

DENNIS. Cheers.

(They clink glasses.)

FRANCES. Let's try that again. Look me in the eye this time.

Lack of eye contact during a toast brings about bad luck. Cheers.

(He looks her in the eye.)

DENNIS. Cheers.

(They clink glasses again, drink.)

FRANCES. So, what's Mom so stressed about?

DENNIS. She's just pissed cause I wouldn't go to the play with her.

FRANCES. Not a big theatre buff?

DENNIS. Not really.

FRANCES. You ever been to a play?

DENNIS. I saw *A Christmas Carol* in Chicago when I was like four.

FRANCES. Tiny Tim didn't do it for you?

DENNIS. No.

FRANCES. I saw *A Christmas Carol* at Madison Square Garden a few years ago. This octogenarian from General Hospital was Scrooge. Tiny Tim was played by some Olympic silver medalist figure skater. Katie Chong or Pong or Wakazashi or some shit.

DENNIS. What's an octogenarian?

FRANCES. A person in their eighties. Watch out, they're taking over the world. Or at least a theater near you... So, you've only seen one play?

DENNIS. Uh-huh.

FRANCES. How do you know you don't like theatre?

DENNIS. I just do.

FRANCES. Don't be so provincial.

DENNIS. What?

FRANCES. You're obviously from the Midwest, tell me I'm wrong.

DENNIS. You're not.

FRANCES. What part?

DENNIS. Illinois.

FRANCES. Then you're forgiven. For now at least. There's still hope.

DENNIS. Hope for what?

FRANCES. That you'll turn out okay. A little culture's good for the glands, eh?

DENNIS. You an actress or somethin'?

FRANCES. Memorize all those lines? No fucking way.

DENNIS. What do you do?

FRANCES. Go to parties. Ride around in antique sports cars. Eat three hundred dollar meals financed by middle-aged men with silver hair and glucosamine sulfate addictions.

DENNIS. So you're like a hooker?

FRANCES. You wish...I used to work at a Gallery. Now I basically get away with stuff and get to dress up nice for it. How's that for a job description?

DENNIS. Where are you from?

FRANCES. Where do you *think* I'm from?

DENNIS. I don't know. Here.

FRANCES. As in I was born under the candy machine on the fourth floor? What part of Illinois?

DENNIS. Freeport.

FRANCES. Where's that?

DENNIS. Northwest corner of the state. Sorta near Iowa.

FRANCES. Corn.

DENNIS. Yeah.

FRANCES. Corn, cattle, and combines.

DENNIS. Pretty much.

FRANCES. You live on a farm?

DENNIS. No.

FRANCES. Shorn any sheep in your day? Tipped your favorite bovine?

DENNIS. I've de-tasseled corn.

FRANCES. Oooh, rebel rebel.

DENNIS. You prolly don't even know what a combine is.

FRANCES. Sure I do.

DENNIS. What is it?

FRANCES. It's one of those big, bulky tractor-type-things that...combines.

DENNIS. Not really.

FRANCES. Give a city girl a break, huh?

(A knock on the door. She freezes, then gestures that she isn't there and that she is going into the bathroom, quietly exits to the bathroom, shuts the door. He hides the whiskey in the desk drawer, crosses to the front door, opens it. He speaks to someone, closes the door, returns with a small white bag.)

(FRANCES reenters, holding cassette tapes.)

FRANCES. Who was it?

DENNIS. Some creature from the front desk.

FRANCES. The redhead or the Puerto Rican?

DENNIS. Maybe the redhead.

FRANCES. Six-six? Rockabilly fauxhawk.

(He nods.)

FRANCES. What'd he want?

(He holds up the bag, then reaches into it, removes a small stuffed bear wearing an "I Heart NYC" T-shirt.)

FRANCES. Cute. Secret admirer?

DENNIS. I wish. It's from my mom. She can't resist the gift shop. She's like one of those fat ladies at the mall. If she gets a whiff of the caramel corn she can't stop shoppin. Yesterday she went down for Starbucks and

came back with a Statue of Liberty paperweight and three souvenir spoons. *(He grabs the stuffed monkey.)* And this guy traveled with us all the way from Illinois. He's her spiritual advisor.

(He throws the monkey on the floor and it screeches a few times. The joke doesn't go over well. He banishes the monkey to the drawer of the armoire.)

FRANCES. Is the bear for you?

DENNIS. It's prolly for my Aunt Billy.

FRANCES. You have an aunt named Billy?

DENNIS. Her real name is Diana but everyone calls her Billy – don't ask me why. She sorta looks like John Goodman from *The Big Lebowski*.

FRANCES. Yikes...*(holding the cassette tapes up)* Cassettes from the bathroom: The Bangles, Juice Newton, and... Maryanne's Magical Mystery Mix?

DENNIS. They're my mom's.

FRANCES. Festive.

(She sets the cassettes on the table, returns to making her drink, can't find the whiskey.)

DENNIS. It's in the drawer.

(She opens the drawer, retrieves the whiskey, makes her drink.)

FRANCES. So what's with all the medical stuff in the bathroom?

DENNIS. It's for my mom.

FRANCES. When I saw her in the hallway didn't seem *that* old. Aside from the cane I suppose.

DENNIS. She's forty-seven.

FRANCES. What's her deal?

DENNIS. She just has a hard time standin' for too long.

FRANCES. She's got some sort of condition?

DENNIS. You could say that.

FRANCES. Like arthritis?

DENNIS. That's part of it. So are you all dressed up cause some old guy's waitin for you?

FRANCES. I was supposed to go to this thing over at Tavern on the Green. But I changed my mind so now I'm here. With you. Don't worry, Dennis, your mom won't mind.

DENNIS. I didn't say she would.

FRANCES. You guys make a cute couple. I saw you earlier. Down in the lobby. She was holding onto your arm. You're quite the gentleman.

(FRANCES' cell phone makes a sound. She looks at it, a bit tense.)

FRANCES. Did you know that Elizabeth Taylor owns a Van Gogh that was looted by the Nazis? That's some crazy shit, huh?

DENNIS. I guess.

(She downs her drink in one gulp.)

FRANCES. So how long are you and your mom in New York?

DENNIS. Just through the weekend.

FRANCES. Aren't you in school?

DENNIS. I'm on spring break.

FRANCES. Shouldn't you be down in Florida doing the Girls Gone Wild thing?

DENNIS. I wish.

FRANCES. I can't imagine spring break with mom being too thrilling.

DENNIS. Lately I've been gettin this creepy feelin she thinks we're datin.

FRANCES. That's so Greek.

DENNIS. Greeks date their children?

FRANCES. They date em. Fuck em. Cook em in stews...So Mom gets on your nerves, huh? Clingy?

DENNIS. That's an understatement.

FRANCES. She still tucks you in at night? Stirs your Ovaltine, sudsies your hair in the bathtub?

DENNIS. She's just annoying.

FRANCES. You ever fantasize about offing her?

(DENNIS says nothing.)

FRANCES. It's okay, Dennis, it's totally normal. When I was in high school I used to sit in class after class and draw pictures of how I would kill my mom. Elaborate pencil sketches that would take hours. Hangings. Public stonings. Boiling water. Birds attacking her. A saw.

DENNIS. What'd you do with the drawings?

FRANCES. After she kicked me out of the house I started mailing them to her once a week. That lasted for about a year.

DENNIS. What'd you get kicked out of the house for?

FRANCES. Partying. Bringing guys home. Fucking my shrink in her four-poster bed. Catholics can't handle anything...Don't say you've never thought about it.

DENNIS. What, being Catholic?

(His cell phone rings. He looks at it.)

FRANCES. Who is it?

DENNIS. Um, my dad.

FRANCES. Aren't you gonna answer it?

(He answers it, crosses to the bathroom, enters the bathroom. During the phone call, FRANCES looks at the framed photos on the bedside stand. She also sees the pain medication.)

DENNIS. Hello?...Hey...Nothin. Watchin basketball...The Knicks... No...She went to that play...No...Cause I didn't wanna...I don't know...Okay...Yeah, she's *fine*... Where are you?...Why?...What's that in the background?...Dad, don't *(He almost loses it.)* Come on, Dad.

(He reenters. FRANCES quickly sets a picture back on the bedside stand.)

FRANCES. Everything okay?

DENNIS. Everything's fine.

FRANCES. What's up with him?

DENNIS. I can't really talk about it.

FRANCES. Is he some sort of criminal?

DENNIS. I wish.

FRANCES. Where is he?

DENNIS. He won't say.

FRANCES. Mysterious. What does he do?

DENNIS. He's a professional coward.

FRANCES. Tough times for Dennis.

(He grabs the cassettes off the table, returns them to the bathroom.)

FRANCES. At least admit that you've thought about it...

You've seen it go down in your head. A safe lands on her. She gets sucked into the sky by a tornado. She falls into a bottomless pit.

DENNIS. *(reentering)* A pillow.

FRANCES. A pillow. Peaceful.

DENNIS. Why peaceful?

FRANCES. Middle of the night. The moon silvering the window. The sound of a train in the distance. What do you do?

DENNIS. I stand over her bed while she's sleepin...

FRANCES. And then...

DENNIS. And then I press it into her face until she stops...

FRANCES. Stops what?

DENNIS. Breathin.

FRANCES. Well, that's awfully gentle. You realize you'll have to break her neck, too, right?

DENNIS. Why?

FRANCES. Because you have to make sure. You'd hate her to suddenly come up for air. This is the kind of thing you definitely want finality with.

DENNIS. I've thought about a hammer, too. I sneak up behind her when she's doin the dishes.

FRANCES. And...

DENNIS. She's hummin to the radio.

FRANCES. Easy listening?

DENNIS. Classic Eighties.

FRANCES. The Bangles?

DENNIS. Lionel Richie.

FRANCES. Dancin on the ceiling. Then what?

DENNIS. After the first one she goes to a knee. Like she's
tyin her shoelace. Then I keep hittin her till her brains
spill out.

FRANCES. (*producing a cell phone*) Do me a favor, call this
number and hit pound.

(DENNIS starts to take her phone, hesitates.)

DENNIS. Who am I callin?

FRANCES. Don't worry it's nobody important.

DENNIS. Why can't you?

FRANCES. Superstition.

(*He takes her cell phone.*)

FRANCES. You got nice eyes, by the way, Dennis. Warm.

(*He makes the call, waits. She turns away. After a
moment, he hits pound, offers the phone. She remains
turned away.*)

DENNIS. Don't you want your phone back?

(*She reaches back for it. He crosses to her, places it in her
hand.*)

DENNIS. What did I just do?

(*She sits. She cries.*)

DENNIS. Did I just do somethin?

(*She continues crying. He crosses to the box of tissues,
crosses back, hands it to her.*)

FRANCES. Hey, can I borrow twenty bucks?

(*He reaches into his pocket, hands her the twenty bucks
that MARYANNE had given him.*)

DENNIS. You don't have to pay me back.

(She wads the Kleenex.)

FRANCES. So tell me about your school.

DENNIS. It's a military academy.

FRANCES. Boarding?

DENNIS. Yep.

FRANCES. Does it suck as much as I think it does?

DENNIS. Prolly more.

FRANCES. Where is it?

DENNIS. Wisconsin.

FRANCES. Scary place.

DENNIS. You been there?

FRANCES. I was in Milwaukee for a few days once. Smelled like shit. Everyone kept saying it was from a chocolate factory but it reeked of sewage to me. Lots of fat people. Fudruckers and Tanning salons.

DENNIS. My school's in Delafield. It's like twenty minutes north of Milwaukee.

FRANCES. So you know. Why'd you get shipped off – you a fuckup or something?

DENNIS. I don't know.

FRANCES. Oh, come on, Dennis. Military school?

DENNIS. I guess my parents think I don't care about anything.

FRANCES. They send you to military school for apathy? Most people go to shrinks for that.

DENNIS. They tried that for a while, too, but it didn't work.

FRANCES. So you're a genuine lost cause.

DENNIS. I guess.

FRANCES. So is it true?

DENNIS. What.

FRANCES. That you don't care about anything?

DENNIS. I care about shit.

FRANCES. Like what?

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