

**BENJAMIN
SPRUNG-KEYSER**

What All School Children Learn
Dramatic Script

Age 17, Harvard-Westlake School, North Hollywood, CA,
teacher: Christopher Moore

Benjamin Sprung-Keyser, 17

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Benjamin Sprung-Keyser sees his piece as the start of a conversation in which readers disagree about and discuss the issues it raises. He was inspired to write the piece after he took part in a one-act play festival at his high school. He is actively involved with the debate team and also participates in science research.

WHAT ALL SCHOOL CHILDREN LEARN

Dramatic Script

CHARLIE JENKINS – 11 years old, a small seventh grader, son of Martin and Katherine Jenkins

STEVEN – 15 years old, a ninth grader and bully

COOPER – 15 years old, a ninth grader and co-conspirator with Steven

LUKE – 14 years old, a ninth grader and co-conspirator with Steven

MARTIN JENKINS – early 40s, a UPS worker, father of Charlie Jenkins

KATHERINE JENKINS – late 30s, a housekeeper, mother of Charlie Jenkins

MR. BARKLEY – early 50s, school principal

LINDA – mid 40s, a parent

PATRICIA – mid 30s, a parent

MELISSA – mid 40s, mother of Steven

SUSANNE – mid 40s, a parent

JEFF – late 40s, a parent

TERRORIST – early 20s

*“I and the public know
what all school children learn,
those to whom evil is done
do evil in return.”*

—W.H. Auden

SCHOOL YARD – DAY

A middle school lunch area. A large metal trash can sits stage right. In the middle of the stage is a lunch table.

A school bell rings.

CHARLIE, a small prepubescent boy of 11, walks on stage, happily carrying a tin lunchbox. He looks around for his friends. When he sees none, he sits dead center at the table, facing us. He opens up his lunchbox and sets out on the table a sandwich, a banana, a package of cupcakes, and a carton of milk. He starts to eat. Three older boys, each halfway between boyhood and manhood, appear in the lunch area. COOPER, the first of the boys, sits down next to Charlie so as to be uncomfortably close. LUKE, the second bully, sits on the other side so that Charlie is sandwiched. STEVEN, who is clearly their leader, comes up behind and takes Charlie's sandwich out of his hand. He takes a bite and then puts it back in the lunchbox. He picks up the carton of milk and pours it out into the box. The two other boys just sit and laugh. CHARLIE, on the verge of tears, collects his things and runs off stage. The three older boys run off stage after him.

They cross with eight adults, who enter as the boys leave. We are now in a

SCHOOL CONFERENCE ROOM – EVENING

Two of the adults—a man in a UPS uniform and a woman—carry two chairs with them, place them in the corner, and sit. The other six turn the table on an angle. One of them—MR. BARKLEY, dressed in a jacket and a tie—stands behind it. The remaining five gather in front, animated and upset. Their conversation begins at the moment they appear.

PATRICIA

Let me get this straight. A teacher goes to get lunch, she doesn't tell anyone, and she leaves 100 kids unsupervised.

JEFF

The school let this happen, Mr. Barkley?

MR. BARKLEY

A mistake. It was a mistake. I promise you—

LINDA

—How many teachers were supposed to be watching? I mean, how many kids were left without someone to watch them?

MR. BARKLEY

Normally we have one teacher for each play area. And we never have a teacher look after more than 100 children at a time. This was a simple miscommunication.

PATRICIA

None of us want to hear excuses. Do I have to worry about my son being bullied?

MR. BARKLEY

Your child is safe. All of your children are. I—this is an isolated incident.

LINDA

How do you know? I mean it, how do you know? How can you be so sure? Things like this don't happen out of blue. There are reasons, there are warning signs. You need to keep an eye out—

MR. BARKLEY

(Trying to be more forceful) —And we are. I've scheduled a meeting with all of our teachers. If everyone stays calm, Ms. Constantino, we—

SUSANNE

—We have every right to be concerned. Pushing, shoving, a fistfight or two—that you'd expect. Kids are kids. But this is different. I hate to say it, but a normal child doesn't do something like that.

LINDA

If my son were the victim of this, I wouldn't be sitting there so quietly. Melissa, are you sure there's nothing you have to say?

There is a moment of silence as everyone waits for her to respond.

MELISSA

What do you want me to say? Mr. Barkley and I have talked privately, and the school knows exactly how I feel.

MR. BARKLEY

Ms. Lewis' son is being looked after. You have my word.

SUSANNE

Well, that's great, you're fixing the problem now that it's already happened. Guess what? That's not good enough. I need to know how this could happen here, in our school? Something this disturbing and, I hate to say it, this evil. How does a little boy do something like that to a kid four years older and twice his size?

The five parents exit. MR. BARKLEY comes down stage and speaks directly to the audience.

MR. BARKLEY

Three weeks earlier.

He exits the stage and we are in a

SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION OFFICE – MORNING

KATHERINE and MARTIN JENKINS, the two parents who were sitting on the side of the stage, pick up their chairs and place them opposite the table, which is now the desk in Mr. Barkley's office. They place a sign on the desk that says "Principal." MARTIN paces, and KATHERINE checks herself in her compact mirror.

KATHERINE

How do I look?

MARTIN

You look fine. *(Checks his watch.)* I'm gonna get sacked.

KATHERINE

Don't say that, you—

MARTIN

—I'm telling you, I'm gonna miss my shift. (*Gets up to pace.*) Next shift starts at 9, and Peterson gives no leeway. (*Checks his watch again.*) Jesus Christ, do you know how long we have been—

MR. BARKLEY *walks in. He clenches his back.*

MR. BARKLEY

—I'm sorry I'm late. Back problems. They're the worst, and the Advil's not helping. I'm so glad you came in, Mr. and Mrs.... (*Glances at the sheet in his hand.*) ...Jenkins. I...umm— (*He sits down for one second before popping back up, and paces periodically around the room.*) —Do you mind if I stand? Doctor says I've got a fused disk. I'm not sure what that means. I suggest you avoid one. (*He massages his back.*) Anyway... your son, Charlie, right? There's been an incident in the lunch area.

MARTIN

“An incident”? Yeah, you could call it that. Our son is being bullied by a kid three times his size, and there doesn't seem to be anyone trying to stop it.

KATHERINE

Charlie's very quiet. He's not really physical, if you know what I mean. He doesn't like to defend himself. That doesn't make my husband happy but— (*Martin shoots her a look.*) Every day he comes home crying.

MR. BARKLEY

I'm sorry to hear that, Mrs. Jenkins. That must be very upsetting. With so many in such a small space, incidents are bound to happen. I always find these things have two sides to them. They're all pretty good kids, you know. (*Clenches his back.*) Jeez, I—

KATHERINE

(*Trying to be polite*) —But there aren't two sides this. Our 11-year-old is being tormented.

MR. BARKLEY

I understand. Let me ask you a question: Was there a history between Charlie and Steven?

MARTIN

A history?

MR. BARKLEY

Of antagonism?

MARTIN

I don't think you understand. My son is in seventh grade. He is four years younger. He doesn't know this kid from Adam. The kid's a bully who messes with Charlie for kicks.

KATHERINE

Martin!

MARTIN

What? There aren't two sides to this. This isn't like the Palestinians and the Jews or some such thing. You got a bad kid who needs to be punished.

MR. BARKLEY

You may be right. (*Grabs his back, grimaces, and stretches.*) I hate getting old.

MARTIN

(*Laughs.*) You're not gonna do anything, are you?

MR. BARKLEY

What?

MARTIN

You just want this to go away.

MR. BARKLEY

That's not— This may be just kids being kids, Mr. Jenkins. I know Charlie is a sensitive boy, but there is a big difference between roughhousing on the playground and—

MARTIN

You're so fair—

MR. BARKLEY

Thank you.

MARTIN

You didn't let me finish. I was gonna say you're so fair, you're useless. You know that? (*Checks his watch.*) I gotta go. I'm late for work. I just wanna know someone's looking after my kid.

He leaves. And there is a moment of silence.

KATHERINE

I apologize for my husband. He's under a lot of pressure at work. (*Beat*) Martin wishes Charlie were the kind of kid who stood up for himself. I just want to know he'll be safe.

MR. BARKLEY

Of course you do.

KATHERINE

Isn't there a way you could put a few more teachers on the playground during lunch?

MR. BARKLEY

Mrs. Jenkins, I've got 1,500 kids to look out for, and I don't have the money or the manpower to run the school the way I'd like. I'll do the best I can. (*He smiles.*) Don't worry too much. I find that stuff like this blows over quick.

MR. BARKLEY takes his name plaque, and he and MRS. JENKINS exit the stage. They cross with CHARLIE.

The school bell rings. We are now in the

SCHOOL YARD – DAY

CHARLIE carries a few binders in his hand as he enters, looking around nervously. STEVEN, by himself this time, enters the yard and approaches Charlie.

CHARLIE

Leave me alone. I'm not bothering you.

STEVEN

Don't tell me what to do.

CHARLIE

I didn't mean to, I—

STEVEN

—What's for lunch today?

CHARLIE

Sorry, I already ate.

STEVEN comes toward him, menacingly.

CHARLIE

You better not. I'll tell on you. I'll get you in huge trouble—

STEVEN

Yeah, I don't think you wanna do that. Cuz you know what I'll do to you.

STEVEN approaches CHARLIE. With one swat, he knocks the books from Charlie's hands. CHARLIE hesitates, and in a moment of newfound courage he stands up tall.

CHARLIE

Pick them up.

STEVEN

You're kidding, right? You're trying to be brave? Think you can scare me?

Without warning, STEVEN grabs Charlie by his ankles and dangles him above the books. He begins to "walk" Charlie across the yard. Charlie kicks to loosen Steven's grip.

STEVEN

I think you're gonna pick 'em up.

CHARLIE gives up his thrashing and goes to collecting the books, while still hanging.

CHARLIE

Why do you always have to pick on me?

STEVEN

I dunno. Cuz it's fun, cuz you're tiny, cuz I can. What does it matter?

CHARLIE

You could choose someone else once in a while. Why does it always have to be me?

STEVEN

No reason. But I picked you, so live with it.

STEVEN drops Charlie.

STEVEN

Its like you're my prey or something. I'm strong, you're weak, I make the rules.

STEVEN walks off. He leaves Charlie to collect his stuff and run off on the verge of tears. CHARLIE crosses with Mr. and Mrs. Jenkins. KATHERINE and MARTIN bring in plates and mugs to set what is now the table. We are in the

JENKINS HOME – MORNING

MARTIN takes a seat, rubs his eyes, and starts reading a paper. KATHERINE pours coffee. CHARLIE walks in. He's wearing a bathrobe, but it is obvious that his school clothes are underneath.

MARTIN
Morning.

CHARLIE
Really bad news. I can't go to school today.

KATHERINE
Why not?

CHARLIE
Cuz I'm sick.

MARTIN
You're sick? You don't look sick. Don't play games with me. Is something actually wrong?

CHARLIE
'Fraid so. Don't be scared but...I've got rabbit fever.

KATHERINE
Rabbit fever?

CHARLIE
Yeah, it's very dangerous. I looked it up online. It's definitely rabbit fever. I bet I got it from playing with mice in science.

KATHERINE

If you got it from mice, why is it called rabbit fever?

CHARLIE

You can get it from lots of animals. They had to pick one. They picked rabbits. It causes fever, duh, and swelling, and pneumonia. And I've got all those symptoms. (*He coughs.*) I would go to school, but I'm trying to keep my friends safe.

KATHERINE

Come here, let me feel your head. (*She feels his forehead.*) You're not warm. (*She looks at him with disappointment.*)

CHARLIE

Really? Then I definitely have it. Cuz part of the disease is when the symptoms come and go really quickly. Don't ask me why, but that's the way it happens.

MARTIN

You're not sick. You're just lazy and you're gonna go to school.

CHARLIE

Mom!

MARTIN

Charlie, I'm tired, I just got in from the night shift, and I'm gonna go to bed. I don't want to hear anymore about it.

CHARLIE

(*Serious*) I can't go to school. It's too dangerous.

MARTIN

Dangerous, Jesus! It's just some stupid kid. Stay away from him and you'll be fine. Listen, you're going to school, that's final.

CHARLIE

Mom, don't make me go.

MARTIN

Alright. You know what? This is ridiculous. Come here.

CHARLIE

What?

MARTIN

Come here. I'm gonna teach you how to fight. Put up your fists.

CHARLIE

Dad.

KATHERINE

Martin!

MARTIN

Put up your fists... Higher. *(Charlie does it.)* OK. Now punch my hand. Punch my hand, Charlie! *(He puts out his hand for Charlie to punch. Charlie complies weakly.)* Well, you might be able to hurt the mouse that got you sick.

KATHERINE

Martin!

MARTIN

Fine, you're never gonna punch him, anyway. How about kicking? Give me a good strong roundhouse.

CHARLIE

I don't know what that is.

MARTIN

It's where you swing your foot wide out to the side...I'll show you. *(He does a kick and taps Charlie lightly at the end.)*

CHARLIE

Owww!

MARTIN

That didn't hurt.

CHARLIE

You kicked me!

MARTIN

There is no way that a little kick—

CHARLIE

—Mom, Dad kicked me!

MARTIN

You're telling on me!

CHARLIE

Well, you did. You kicked me!

KATHERINE

We're done here, boys! Marty, get to bed. Bed!

MARTIN

Alright, alright. We'll finish this lesson tonight. You're gonna learn to kick that kid's sorry ass. Have a good day at school. You'll be fine, just stick up for yourself.

He gets up and goes.

KATHERINE

Come here, Charlie. *(She kneels to talk to him.)* I can't afford not to go to work today. And I don't have anyone to look after you. Sweetheart, you're gonna be OK. *(He diverts his gaze.)* Look at me. I promise. Just keep an eye out for yourself. *(She takes off his bathrobe.)* Now give your mom a hug, get your lunch, and hurry to the bus. *(He listens, and she watches him run out the door.)* Love you.

CHARLIE

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

The school bell rings, and we are in the

SCHOOL YARD – MORNING

CHARLIE walks onto the playground, carrying his lunch. Voices begin in the distance.

STEVEN (O.S.)

Charlie? Charlie? Where are you?

CHARLIE moves farther downstage, huddling behind the trash can. STEVEN appears. He's searching for Charlie, facing upstage and away from us.

STEVEN

Come on, Charlie. I'm hungry! Don't you have lunch for me?

CHARLIE slinks further behind the trash can and pulls his legs in to not be seen.

STEVEN

You can't hide the rest of the year, Charlie. If you run from me today, tomorrow's gonna be worse... Just you wait. I'm coming for you.

STEVEN walks off stage and CHARLIE relaxes. He takes another bite of his sandwich. KATHERINE walks in carrying a mixing bowl. She hums as she whisks away at the brownie mix. We are now in the

JENKINS KITCHEN – EVENING

CHARLIE takes out a PSP and starts to play.

KATHERINE

Charlie, what are you doing over there?

CHARLIE

Nothing.

KATHERINE

You know, if someone got themselves up and back to the table to do their homework, there might be some extra brownie mix.

CHARLIE puts away his PSP and runs to the table.

CHARLIE

This math homework is fascinating.

KATHERINE

No kidding? What kind of problems are you doing?

CHARLIE

What am I doing? Uhhh... *(Glancing down to figure out what's on the page.)*

Double negatizing. Ms. Green said it was tough, but she was trying to scare us.

KATHERINE

OK. What's negative 12 times negative 12?

CHARLIE

One forty-four. I'm not stupid. Hey, where's the brownie mix you promised me?

She hands over the bowl and he sticks his finger in and takes out a big glob.

CHARLIE

Mom?

KATHERINE

Yeah, Charlie.

CHARLIE

This is good... Listen, about school tomorrow, I—

KATHERINE

—Charlie, we're not going through this again. You are going to school.

CHARLIE

No, I know. That's not what I was going to say. Jeez. I was just gonna to ask for a special lunch.

KATHERINE

A special lunch?

CHARLIE

Yeah, you know. Something to look forward to during the day.

KATHERINE

(Smiling) I think I can do that. What do you want?

CHARLIE

Um, well...uhhh... How about...fried chicken?

KATHERINE

Your favorite.

CHARLIE

And ummm...Sprite... And something for dessert—

KATHERINE

Brownies?

CHARLIE

No, peanuts. A bag of peanuts.

KATHERINE

OK, you got it. Now run upstairs and wake up your dad for the night shift. *(He complies, but he is still on stage as she finishes.)* Charlie, I'm proud of you for doing the right thing. I mean, finding something good to get you through the day.

He runs off. She sticks her finger in the brownie mix as she exits.

The school bell rings, and we are back in the

SCHOOL YARD – DAY

CHARLIE walks back on stage and sits at the lunch table. He lays out his food in front of him. STEVEN and the other two boys sneak up from behind. CHARLIE is about to take a bite of his chicken when STEVEN interrupts.

STEVEN

Not so fast.

STEVEN grabs the chicken and takes a bite before CHARLIE gets one. He holds on to the chicken as he picks up the can of soda and drinks.

CHARLIE

How was it?

STEVEN

Delicious. I'm gonna have some more. *(Takes another bite.)*

CHARLIE

You can have the whole thing if you want.

STEVEN

Very funny.

CHARLIE

How 'bout some peanuts with that?

STEVEN

What? *(A little flustered)* Nah. I'll pass.

CHARLIE gets up with the bag of peanuts, and STEVEN backs off.

CHARLIE

What do you mean you'll pass? Come on, have some peanuts.

CHARLIE walks closer.

STEVEN

Get away from me!

CHARLIE

What's wrong? Why not peanuts? You want my food. Take my food.
(He offers the peanuts again.)

STEVEN

Get away, you freak.

CHARLIE

What's the matter? Can't you eat peanuts? Oh, wait, maybe you can't. Maybe you can't eat peanuts. Maybe you're allergic. *(He walks closer with the bag of peanuts outstretched.)*

STEVEN

I'm telling you to get away.

CHARLIE is emboldened by Steven's fear.

CHARLIE

Oops. Maybe it's too late. I mean, maybe you already ate some. Right, cuz maybe they were on my chicken. Maybe I rubbed them in the crispy stuff. Same color. You couldn't really tell the difference, could you?

Suddenly, STEVEN drops the chicken.

STEVEN

Did you? Did you put peanuts in the chicken? Tell me now. I'll kill you. You asshole. I'll kill you.

He walks toward CHARLIE, who grabs a bunch of peanuts and grinds them in his hand.

CHARLIE

(With unnerving calm) I wouldn't get any closer if I were you.

STEVEN

What the fuck is wrong with you? I need to know if you gave me peanuts!

CHARLIE

I don't feel like telling yet. (*Thinks for a second.*) How 'bout you tell Cooper that you love him first.

STEVEN

What? Are you serious? Just tell me if I—

CHARLIE

(*Louder*) —How 'bout you tell Cooper that you love him?

STEVEN

(*Quickly, to get it over with*) Cooper, I love you. Now did you put peanuts—?

CHARLIE

—Oh, c'mon, no one believed that. Tell him like ya mean it...NOW.

STEVEN

(*Scared, but more sweetly*) Cooper...I love you.

CHARLIE

What?

STEVEN

I love you!

CHARLIE

That's better.

STEVEN

Now tell me if I ate any peanuts, Jesus Christ! I don't think you get it. I could fucking die—

CHARLIE

—Yeah, I know.

It is all changed now. CHARLIE has the power, not Steven. Charlie likes it, and he hates it. It excites him and it scares him.

STEVEN

Why are you doing this? Please, I need to know if you gave me any peanuts!

STEVEN is on of the verge of tears. He shakes. A wet spot appears on his pants.

CHARLIE

You wet your pants.

STEVEN tries to cover up.

STEVEN

What the fuck is wrong with you? Tell me if I ate peanuts.

CHARLIE's had enough. Time to end this.

CHARLIE

Let's get some things straight. You will NEVER come near me again.

STEVEN

OK—

CHARLIE

—Cuz you'll never know where I put some peanuts. In my food, on my lunchbox, on my books, on me. I'm gonna have peanuts everywhere. Are we clear?... Are we clear?

STEVEN

Yes, yes, we're clear. God-fucking-dammit. Just tell me if I ate any peanuts.

CHARLIE

These... *(He holds them out.)* Not today. *(He pauses.)* Now get away from me.

STEVEN runs off. CHARLIE stands there for a moment, then calmly packs up his lunchbox and walks out.

He crosses with the eight adults just as he did before. They take their places, just as before, and we are in the

SCHOOL CONFERENCE ROOM – DAY

MELISSA

What do you want me to say? Mr. Barkley and I have talked privately, and the school knows exactly how I feel.

MR. BARKLEY

Ms. Lewis' son is being looked after. You have my word.

SUSANNE

Well, that's great, you're fixing the problem now that it's already happened. Guess what? That's not good enough. I need to know how this could happen here, in our school? Something this disturbing and, I hate to say it, this evil. How does a little boy do something like that to a kid four years older and twice his size?

KATHERINE

He was provoked. My son was tortured.

MELISSA stands and responds more angrily. She has been offended by this last remark.

MELISSA

No. He may have been teased, had his lunch taken one or twice, but he was not tortured. My son was tortured. Whatever Steven did, he didn't deserve what he got back.

MARTIN

And what was that?

MELISSA

Your boy tried to kill him.

KATHERINE

He did not.

MELISSA

Yes, Mrs. Jenkins, he did. Peanuts are no different from a gun or a knife—

MARTIN

—Charlie scared him, that's all. He gave him a fright, which your kid damn well deserved... A fright, by the way, that's gonna keep your kids safe. 'Cause next time, bullies will think twice about messing with little kids. If anything, my boy did you all a service, but you're gonna turn on him.

SUSANNE

I find the whole thing very disturbing, but he's got a point. This started with bullying.

MELISSA

My son is not a bully. He's not a bad kid. He goofs around sometimes. He roughhouses. Maybe sometimes he goes too far. Just 'cause he's big for his age—with all that testosterone—just 'cause he's physical doesn't mean he's a bully. Why can't we let boys be boys anymore? If they're not sitting quietly somewhere, acting like girls, there's something wrong with them. Well, there's nothing wrong with my son. For God's sake, if a few boys decide to have some fun and toilet-paper a house, that doesn't give you the right to take out a shotgun, like some nutjob, and gun them down.

KATHERINE

That's not what happened. Charlie just did what he had to do.

LINDA

What he had to do? Even you can't believe that.

KATHERINE

It's the truth. He took care of himself. No one else would.

JEFF

That's ridiculous. He could have gone to a teacher, to the principal—

MARTIN

—He tried!

KATHERINE

Everyone who was strong enough to protect him walked away. My husband and I—we were too busy, too tired. We didn't want to hear about it every day. So we just sent him to school and told him to keep to himself, to do the best he could. And the school? The school did nothing.

MR. BARKLEY

Mrs. Jenkins, we sat down together—

MARTIN

—You did nothing!

MR. BARKLEY

We can't have eyes everywhere, Mrs. Jenkins. We can't protect every child every time. Things happen. Things slip through the cracks. We make it as safe as possible, but we can't make it a perfect world.

MARTIN

Then don't blame my kid for figuring out how to survive in your screwed-up world. He's 11 years old. Tiny. He hasn't even gone through puberty yet. What's he supposed to do? Day after day he's humiliated by a kid who might as well be a man. Like some sadistic boss who's got it in for you—

KATHERINE

—Martin!

MARTIN

(To Katherine) No! *(To the other parents)* You tell me you don't know what that's like! To be at the mercy of some asshole who treats you like crap just because he can.

KATHERINE

Martin!

MR. BARKLEY

Mr. Jenkins—

MARTIN

—All we did was send my boy back to be tortured, again and again. And we said, Oh, yeah, you can fight back. Just do to that kid what he did to you. He punches you, punch him. He stole your lunchbox, steal his. But here's the problem: That's not gonna work. Charlie could do it, but he's gonna get killed. My boy knows that. Maybe someday, but not now. If he can only throw a punch once one's been thrown at him, he's gonna lose. So what did he do? He found a new way to fight. A new weapon. One that made things even again. And that's what really gets you. Cuz it turns the world upside down. A few kids get beaten up on the playground, who gives a crap, right? Because you still think you understand the rules. The game still makes sense to you. But not anymore. This changes everything.

The next lines come right on top of each other as the room turns into a frenzy.

LINDA

You're right, it changes everything. I don't care what the circumstances are. There is something wrong with a kid who would do what your son did.

KATHERINE

There's nothing wrong with him, he just—

PATRICIA

—What? Snapped under pressure?

KATHERINE

It's called defending yourself—

LINDA

—Threatening to kill a 15-year-old is not self-defense.

MR. BARKLEY

OK, this is not helping—

LINDA

—How is this so different from the kids you hear about on the news? You know, like the ones at Columbine. They were bullied, they were teased. And they went home and got their guns, and came to school and—

KATHERINE

—How dare you?! How dare you! My son didn't hurt anyone.

JEFF

But he got close. He threatened to. What if he gets teased again? What happens next time?

MARTIN

OK. That's it! I'm done with this crap. You take any action against my son, you're gonna hear from a lawyer. *(To Katherine)* C'mon, we're going.

KATHERINE

I don't—

MARTIN

Circus is over. Come on.

MARTIN storms out and KATHERINE follows. Silence.

LINDA

(Quietly) I don't feel safe having my child at school with that boy. I

hate to say it, but his father was right. A kid getting his lunch stolen I can deal with. A brawl on the playground I can deal with. I don't like it if a kid gets hurt, but I can live with it. Because I understand it. I get how it happens. But this—this is different. It's scary. This changes the whole world.

BLACKOUT.

LIGHTS UP ON TWO BEDROOMS.

On one side of the stage, CHARLIE sits cross-legged on the ground facing us. On the other side, behind the table—now a desk—sits a young man, a TERRORIST. Next to him lies an assault rifle. He speaks aloud as he writes a letter.

TERRORIST

Mom, this is my last letter to you. Don't listen to what they tell you about us. This is the only way. What's right and wrong, anyway? Everyone swears by God that they're right. Right and wrong are nothing. All that matters is the power you have to make your own right and wrong. *(Stands up and brandishes his gun.)* They have armies, and planes, and tanks. We have nothing. They occupy our home, they make us prisoners, and then they kill us when we fight back. And all of it, the whole thing, within rules of war. Made for countries, by countries. We have no country. When we fight, they say we're doing it in the name of terror. But what is terror? Terror is what makes those who make the rules afraid. *(He loads ammunition.)*

The lights dim on the TERRORIST and rise on CHARLIE with a video game controller in his hand. Sounds from a war game fill the room, and CHARLIE accompanies them with his own explosions.

KATHERINE (O.S.)

Charlie! Charlie! Come downstairs, Charlie. We need to talk.

BLACKOUT.