THE WHALE

a play

by Samuel D. Hunter
Characters

CHARLIE  Early to mid forties, male, weighing around 600 lbs.
LIZ       Mid to late thirties, female.
ELDER THOMAS  19, male.
ELLIE     17, female.
MARY      Early to mid forties, female.

Setting

Northern Idaho, the present.

The main room of a small, white-walled, desolate apartment in a cheaply constructed two story building. The room is dominated by a large couch that sags in the middle, re-enforced by several cinder blocks. Within arm's reach of the couch are: a small computer desk on rollers with a laptop on top, a large pile of papers, a walker, a claw for reaching, and a whole universe of full, empty, and half empty food containers (donuts, candy bars, fried chicken, burgers, two liter soda bottles, etc.). Little effort has been made to clean up trash or organize.

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

Note

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

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

A “/” indicates an overlap in dialogue.
MORNING.

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

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

(pulling out an essay)
"There were many aspects to the book _The Great Gatsby_. But I was bored by it because it was about people that I don't care about and they do things I don't understand. In conclusion, _The Great Gatsby_ wasn't so great, LOL."

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

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

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

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

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

A knock at the door.

Liz?!

Another knock.

CHARLIE

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

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

ELDER THOMAS

Oh, my God. Oh, Gosh, are you—?

(pause)

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

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

ELDER THOMAS

I don’t have a phone, do you have—?

CHARLIE pulls out a few sheets of paper, hands them to ELDER THOMAS.
Read this to me.

CHARLIE

ELDER THOMAS

Wait, what?

CHARLIE

ELDER THOMAS

Read it to me, please.

I have to call you an ambulance! I don’t know what to do, I’m just—

CHARLIE

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

ELDER THOMAS

OKAY! OKAY, I JUST— (reading, quickly)

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

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

CHARLIE (pleading)

PLEASE JUST READ IT. ANY OF IT.

ELDER THOMAS (reading)

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

CHARLIE’s breathing starts to become normal. He takes a few deep breaths, calming himself down.

Did that—help?

ELDER THOMAS

Yes. Yes, it did.

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

CHARLIE
I don’t go to hospitals.

ELDER THOMAS
I can’t help you, I don’t even know CPR—!

I don’t go to hospitals.
(pause)
I’m sorry. Excuse me, I’m sorry. You can go if you want, I... Thank you for reading that to me.

Pause.. ELDER THOMAS doesn’t move.

Are you feeling better?

ELDER THOMAS
Yes.

Are you sure?

ELDER THOMAS
Yes.

ELDER THOMAS
Okay. Um. I—
(pause)
I represent the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints? We’re sharing a message for all faiths?

CHARLIE
Oh.

ELDER THOMAS
Yeah.
(pause)
Would you—like to hear about the Church?

Pause.
CHARLIE

Okay.

ELDER THOMAS

Really?

CHARLIE

Yes. Actually, yes.

(pause)

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

ELDER THOMAS

Okay, good, where’s your—?

CHARLIE

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

ELDER THOMAS

Do you want me to—...

CHARLIE

Stay with me.

Pause.

ELDER THOMAS

I really should—

CHARLIE

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

ELDER THOMAS

Yeah, okay.

CHARLIE

Thank you.

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

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

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

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

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

LIZ
You should have called an ambulance.

CHARLIE
With no health insurance?

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

CHARLIE
Did I have a heart attack?

LIZ
No, you didn’t have a heart attack.
    (reading his blood pressure)
Huh.

What is it?

    Pause.

Tell me what you felt.

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

How are you sleeping?

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

    LIZ takes out a stethoscope. She checks his breathing.

    LIZ
You’re wheezing.
I always wheeze, Liz.

LIZ

You’re wheezing more. Take a deep breath.

CHARLIE takes a deep breath.

LIZ

Did that hurt?

CHARLIE

A little. What was my blood pressure?

LIZ

238 over 134.

Pause. LIZ puts the stethoscope away.

CHARLIE

Oh.

LIZ

Yeah. Oh.

Pause.

CHARLIE

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

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

LIZ watches him.

LIZ

You want help?

CHARLIE

No, I’m fine. Just—. Sorry.

LIZ

What are you sorry about?
Sorry. I don’t know. Sorry.

CHARLIE

CHARLIE makes his way to the bathroom, wheezing loudly.

ELDER THOMAS and LIZ look at one another.

I should go.

ELDER THOMAS

LIZ

Thank you. For helping him. (pause)

You on your mission?

ELDER THOMAS

What?

LIZ

Is this your mission? You’re on your mission now?

ELDER THOMAS

Oh—yeah.

LIZ

Where are you from?

ELDER THOMAS

Iowa.

LIZ

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

ELDER THOAMS

Yeah, I don’t know. Some of my friends got to go to Los Angeles. A few went to Africa. It’s—fine. (pause)

Is he going to be—?

LIZ

No. No, he’s not.

ELDER THOMAS

He’s sick?
LIZ

He’s very, very, very sick.
(pause)
I grew up Mormon.

ELDER THOMAS

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

LIZ

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

ELDER THOMAS

That’s a really unfair summary of my beliefs.

LIZ

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

ELDER THOMAS

He has a plan.

LIZ

A plan that he’s constantly revising.

ELDER THOMAS

I guess.

Pause.

LIZ

Look—it was good of you to stay with him. But if you’re waiting around to convert him, or—

ELDER THOMAS

We don’t “convert people”. Our message is a message of hope for / people of all faiths—
LIZ
People of all faiths, I know, you’re sweet. But he’s not interested in what you have to say. It’s the last thing he wants to hear.
   (lights up a cigarette)
Listen, you can go if you want. I know Charlie appreciates what you did.

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

Pause.

LIZ
Charlie said he wanted to hear about the church?

Yes.

ELDER THOMAS

Pause.

No, he doesn’t.

Why not?

ELDER THOMAS

LIZ
I just know.

ELDER THOMAS

How?

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

ELDER THOMAS

How?

LIZ
It killed his boyfriend.

Pause.

ELDER THOMAS

You’re saying the church—
LIZ
—killed his boyfriend. Yes, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints killed Charlie’s boyfriend.
(pause)
And I should add that, personally, the Mormon Church has caused me a lot of pain in my life. That guy in there is the only person I have any more that even resembles a friend, and I am not letting you come over here to talk to him. Especially not now, not this week.

ELDER THOMAS

Why not this week?

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

ELDER THOMAS

Where is he going?

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

CHARLIE
I’m sorry you had to come over, Liz. And I’m sorry—

LIZ
It’s alright.

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

Pause.

LIZ
Charlie, your blood pressure is 238 over 134.

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

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

Pause.

CHARLIE
I’m sorry, I’m feeling better now. You can go back to—
Go to the hospital.

I'm sorry.

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

Liz—I'm sorry—

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

I can't!

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

Pause.

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

GODAMMIT CHARLIE.

I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I know, I'm—an awful person. I know. I'm sorry.

Pause.

Do you still want to hear about the church?

NO. HE DOES NOT.

Okay. That's fine, I'm sorry, I—I'll go.

(pause)

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

CHARLIE

It's a really good essay.

ELDER THOMAS

I actually thought it was pretty bad.

CHARLIE

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

ELDER THOMAS exits. A few beats pass.

LIZ

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

CHARLIE

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

CHARLIE grunts in pain, holding his chest a bit.

LIZ

What?

CHARLIE

I'm fine.

LIZ

No, you're not.

Pause.

CHARLIE

I think—I need to call Ellie.

ELLIE?

LIZ

Yeah.

Pause.

LIZ

What, so you're like—giving up?
CHARLIE

What else am I supposed to do?

LIZ

Go to the hospital!

CHARLIE

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

LIZ

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

I know. I’m sorry.

LIZ

You say you’re sorry again, I’m going to shove a knife right into you, I swear to—

CHARLIE

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

Pause. LIZ laughs.

LIZ

Fuck you.

CHARLIE smiles. They look at one another.

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

She turns on the television, flips through the channels absentmindedly.

LIZ

I’ve been telling you that this was gonna happen.

Yeah.
Haven't I been telling you—?

Yes, I know. You have.

Pause.

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

LIZ continues to flip through the channels. Silence.

Did you bring food?

Silence. LIZ continues to flip channels.

Liz.

LIZ flips a few more channels. Silence.

I'm really hungry.

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

Thank you.

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

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

CHARLIE continues to eat, LIZ watches the television.
NIGHT.

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

(soft)

CHARLIE

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

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

CHARLIE

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

CHARLIE breathes. He shifts on the couch, the movement causing pain in his chest.

CHARLIE

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

CHARLIE’s settles into the couch, closes his eyes.

CHARLIE

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

Lights quickly snap to black.

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

MORNING.

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

How much?

CHARLIE

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

ELLIE

That’s disgusting.

CHARLIE

I know. It is disgusting, I’m sorry.

ELLIE

Does this mean I’m going to get fat?

CHARLIE

No, it doesn’t. I was always big, but I just—let it get out of control.

Pause.

ELLIE

Who was the woman?

What woman?

CHARLIE

ELLIE

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

CHARLIE

Oh, that’s—my friend, Liz.

ELLIE

You have a friend?

CHARLIE

Yeah. She’s a nurse, she used to do in-house calls for the hospice—
ELLIE
Is she, like, your fag hag? Because it seems like she could do a lot better.

Pause.

CHARLIE
Was your mom okay with you coming here?

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

(pause)
Why don’t you just go to the hospital?

I don’t have health insurance.

CHARLIE
But you might die.

ELLIE
It’s not worth it.

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

ELLIE
You actually care?

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

(pause)
So why aren’t—don’t you have school?

ELLIE
Suspended until Friday.

CHARLIE
Oh. Why?

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

CHARLIE
You don’t like high school?
ELLIE

Only retards like high school.

CHARLIE

But—you’re going to pass, right?

ELLIE

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

It’s important.

CHARLIE

How would you know?

(pause)

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

CHARLIE

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

ELLIE

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

CHARLIE

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

ELLIE

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

Small pause.

Yeah, sure.

CHARLIE

ELLIE grabs a donut from a package sitting near the kitchen.

ELLIE

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

Yeah.

ELLIE

Why did you gain all that weight?

Pause.

CHARLIE

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

ELLIE

Why?

CHARLIE

We don’t even know one another.

So?

ELLIE

Pause.

CHARLIE

I can pay you.

ELLIE

You want to pay me to spend time with you?

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

ELLIE

Are you serious?

CHARLIE picks up some essays sitting next to him.

CHARLIE

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

ELLIE

How are you like, qualified to edit essays?

CHARLIE

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

Yes.

Your students know what you look like?

Pause.

I don’t use a camera. Just a microphone.

That’s probably a good idea. (pause)

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

I really shouldn’t write them for you.

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

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

How much money do you have in the bank?

Pause.

A hundred and twenty—

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

Thousand. A hundred and twenty thousand dollars. (CONTINUED:)
CHARLIE (cont.)

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

ELLIE
You’d give all that money to me? Not my mom, to me?

CHARLIE
Yes. All of it. Just—don’t mention it to your mom. Okay?

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

ELLIE
Why?

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

ELLIE
I don’t even understand you.

(silence)
Stand up and walk over to me.

CHARLIE
What?

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

CHARLIE pauses for a second, then reaches for his walker.

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

Ellie, I can’t really—

CHARLIE

ELLIE
Shut up. Come over here.

* CHARLIE takes a few deep breaths, then tries to stand on his feet.
He is unsuccessful at getting off the couch, and his chest starts to hurt him immensely. His breathing becomes quicker.

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

ELLIE stares at him, unmoved.
NIGHT.

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

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

LIZ

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

LIZ starts attaching the machine to CHARLIE’s hand.

Where did you get this thing?

CHARLIE

LIZ

Ginny, from the hospital, she’s into this stuff.

Do you know how to use it?

CHARLIE

LIZ

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

(turns on the machine)

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

Pause.

CHARLIE

So what do I—?

LIZ

I don’t know, just—relax. Take a deep breath. You’re calm. You’re very, very calm.

CHARLIE takes a deep breath. LIZ rubs his shoulders a bit, watching the machine.
LIZ
There, the number’s going down. Isn’t that better? It’s about establishing a relationship between your brain and your body. Now you know you’re calming yourself down because the little machine is telling you so.

CHARLIE
You really think this is going to help?

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

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

Ellie came over.

Pause.

She did?

LIZ
Yes.

She’s—amazing.

(paused)

LIZ
Yeah?

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

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

What do you mean?

CHARLIE

LIZ
Sorry, but you haven’t seen this girl since she was two years old, and now you want to reconnect with her? By doing her homework for her?
CHARLIE
It’s fine. It’ll be fine.

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

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

Why?

CHARLIE
She has this—website.

CHARLIE opens up his laptop, pulls up a website. LIZ looks at the computer.

I don’t understand, what am I looking at?

CHARLIE
She calls it a “hate blog”. She posts pictures of her friends, her mom even, and she just—insults them. The only thing she ever talks about is how much she doesn’t like people.

Huh. She’s an angry little girl.

Yes, she is. And I’m worried.

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

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

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

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

CHARLIE
You never told me about that.

LIZ
Yeah, well, it's not exactly a time in my life I love to think about, or—.
(pause)
I'm just saying, you should be thankful that Ellie's doing this shit on the internet and not getting herself into real trouble.

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

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

LIZ heads back to the kitchen.

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

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

Well, she—

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

Pause. CHARLIE starts to panic.

LIZ
What?
(no response)
Charlie, you okay?
LIZ comes out of the kitchen, sees CHARLIE.

LIZ

Oh God. Oh God, are you choking?! You’re choking?!

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

LIZ

Okay, okay—lean over the arm!

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

LIZ

Shit. Oh, shit, Charlie.

CHARLIE

(breathing heavily)

I’m okay. I’m okay,

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

LIZ

GODDAMMIT CHARLIE, WHAT IS WRONG WITH YOU?

I’m sorry—

CHARLIE

LIZ

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

Silence. LIZ breathes.

I’m sorry, Liz.

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

LIZ

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

(pause)

You want a Dr. Pepper?

Pause.

CHARLIE

(quiet)

I'm sorry, Liz.

LIZ

I asked if you want a Dr. Pepper.

Pause.

CHARLIE

(quieter)

I'm sorry.

Lights quickly snap to black.

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

MORNING.

CHARLIE sits in front of the computer, as before, speaking into a microphone.

CHARLIE
A lot of you had some questions about my most recent assignment, so I just wanted to clear up some misconceptions. This is a new teaching strategy I'm trying out, so please bear with me. First, when I asked you to "make it more personal", I was not being "creepy" as Tina436 recently commented. And when I asked you to "not edit your bad grammar or potentially subjective, unspecific, or just plain stupid ideas", I had not gone "apeshit insane yo" as UNCMark45 recently commented. Do you all realize that I can access the class discussion forum?

(pause)
Listen, at this point in this class, I've given you all I can in terms of structure, building a thesis, paragraph organization. But for once—just write it. See what happens. It won't count toward your final grade, you can rewrite it later if you want, I just—I want to know what you really think. Okay?
AFTERNOON.

CHARLIE sits on the couch, ELLIE sits in a chair on the other side of the room, typing on her iPhone. CHARLIE is reading an essay.

CHARLIE

This is…

(pause)

You say here that Walt Whitman wrote “Song For Myself”.

ELLIE

(not looking up)

Yeah?

CHARLIE

It’s called “Song of Myself”.

ELLIE

My title’s better.

Pause.

CHARLIE

Yeah, well, it—- Okay, I’ll just change it.

CHARLIE writes something in the essay. He keeps reading.

CHARLIE

Okay. “In the poem ‘Song of Myself’ by Walt Whitman, the author tells us how amazing he is. He tells us that he is better than everyone else, and that people should listen to what he says, because he is so wonderful.”

ELLIE

You don’t need to read it out loud. Just correct it.

CHARLIE

But it’s not—- This really isn’t what the poem is about.

ELLIE

Yes it is. I read it. It was really long and boring and it was about how great he thinks he is.
CHARLIE
But he's not really talking about himself, he's using the metaphor of "I" to refer to something a lot more universal. That's what's so amazing about the poem, on the surface it seems really self-involved and narcissistic, but actually it's about exploding the entire definition of the "self" in favor of this all-encompassing—

ELLIE
Oh my God I don't care.

Pause.

CHARLIE
You just want me to write it for you?

Yes.

CHARLIE
You don't want to understand the poem at all?

ELLIE finally looks up from her iPhone:

ELLIE
You think I don't understand it?

CHARLIE
Well—

ELLIE
You're just like my idiot teachers. You think because I don't go nuts over some stupid little poem, it's because I'm too stupid to understand it.

I didn't say that—

ELLIE
Maybe I do understand it. Maybe I understand exactly what this poem is about, but I just don't care. Because it was written by some self-involved moron, and even though he thinks that his "metaphor for the self" is deep and shit, it doesn't mean anything because he's just some worthless nineteenth-century faggot. How about that?

Pause. They stare at one another.

CHARLIE
That's an interesting perspective.
ELLIE
You think you’re funny?

CHARLIE
It could make for an interesting essay.

ELLIE
Oh my God shut up. Just fix it, okay? Write that thing about “exploding the definition of self”, my English teacher will love that.

ELLIE goes back to her iPhone. CHARLIE stares at her.

How’s your mom doing?

CHARLIE
Oh my God.

ELLIE
I just thought we could—talk. A little.

ELLIE
If you’re not going to write these essays for me, then I’m not gonna—

CHARLIE
Look, Ellie, I don’t need you here to write this for you. I could write this essay in my sleep. And it’s not fair of me to force you to stay here. If you really don’t want to be here, you can go. You can still have the money.

Pause. ELLIE looks at CHARLIE.

ELLIE
You’d let me have the money anyway?

Yes.

CHARLIE
I thought you wanted to get to know me.

CHARLIE
I do. But I don’t want to force you to be here, that’s not fair. It’s up to you.

ELLIE looks at him for a second, then puts away the iPhone.
ELLIE

She's fine. Mom, I guess.

CHARLIE

Have you told her that you're coming over here?

ELLIE

No. She'd be pretty angry. Plus, she'd want the money.

CHARLIE

Is she—happy?

ELLIE

When she drinks.

CHARLIE

Oh.

(pause)

Do you guys still live over in the duplex over on Orchard?

ELLIE

You don't even know where we live? How'd you get my cell-phone number?

CHARLIE

Facebook.

ELLIE

Creepy. You don't stay in touch with mom?

CHARLIE

Sometimes. She really only tells me things about you.

Why?

ELLIE

Because that's all I ask about.

CHARLIE

Pause.

ELLIE

When I was little we moved to an apartment on the other side of town, near the Circle K.

CHARLIE

Is your mother—with anyone now?
No. Why, you interested?

CHARLIE

Oh, no, I was just—

ELLIE

I’m kidding, Jesus. How could you be with anyone? (pause) Why did you gain all that weight?

CHARLIE

Oh, that doesn’t—

ELLIE

If you’re gonna interrogate me, I get to do the same thing. Why did you gain all that weight?

Pause.

CHARLIE

Someone very close to me passed away, and it—had an effect on me.

Who was it?

CHARLIE

My…

ELLIE

CHARLIE hesitates.

Your boyfriend?

CHARLIE

Yes, my boyfriend. My partner.

What was his name?

ELLIE

CHARLIE

Alan.

ELLIE

How’d he die?
CHARLIE
He sort of... Slowly killed himself.
(pause)
He had the flu, and it developed into pneumonia, but he got that sick because he—just sort of shut down. Stopped taking care of himself, stopped eating.

ELLIE
Why did he do that?

CHARLIE
He felt guilty.
(quick pause)
I'd rather not talk about this right now, is that alright with you?

ELLIE
Whatever.

Pause.

CHARLIE
I'll fix this essay for you before you leave, but I'd like you to do a little writing for me. Alright?

ELLIE
You were serious about that?

CHARLIE
Yes. Here.

CHARLIE pulls out a notebook and a pen, hands them to ELLIE.

ELLIE
I hate writing essays.

CHARLIE
I know, just—be honest. Just think about the poem for a while, and write something. Write what you really think.

ELLIE
You want me to write what I really think?
CHARLIE

Yes. Don't worry about it being good, I'm the only person who will see it.

(short pause)

Okay, I'm going to be in the bathroom for a while, but I'll start working on your essay after—

ELLIE

I'm not helping you to the bathroom.

CHARLIE

I didn't ask you to help.

With a lot of effort, CHARLIE manages to stand up with his walker. He makes his way to the bathroom. ELLIE starts writing absent-mindedly. After a sentence or so, she gets bored. She opens up CHARLIE's laptop and starts looking around.

A knock at the door.

ELLIE is about to call for CHARLIE, then stops. She thinks for a moment.

ELLIE goes to the door, opening it. ELDER THOMAS stands in the doorway.

ELDER THOMAS

Oh, hi—uh. I'm... I was looking for Charlie?

ELLIE

He's in the bathroom.

ELDER THOMAS

Oh, okay.

(short pause)

I can come back, if he—

ELLIE

No, it's fine. Come in.

ELDER THOMAS comes inside, ELLIE shuts the door behind him.

ELDER THOMAS

Are you his—friend?
I'm his daughter.

ELDER THOMAS

Oh. Wow, I... I didn't know that.

ELLIE

You surprised?

ELDER THOMAS

Yes.

ELLIE

What's more surprising? That a gay guy has a daughter, or that someone found his penis?

ELDER THOMAS

I really should go.

ELLIE

Don't be a pussy. That nametag makes you look like a retard.

ELDER THOMAS

We—have to wear them.

ELLIE

I don't care. What are you doing here again? Who are you?

ELDER THOMAS

Charlie said he—wanted to hear about the church. I'm with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. I came by the other day, he wasn't feeling well, I thought I'd try him again. I brought some reading materials, and I thought we could talk about—

ELLIE

I'm bored.

ELDER THOMAS

Oh.

Pause.

ELLIE

I'll tell you one thing I like about religion. What I like about religion is that it assumes everyone is an idiot and that they're incapable of saving themselves. I think they got something right with that.
ELDER THOMAS

That’s not really what I—

ELLIE

I’m not finished talking. I’m saying that I appreciate how religion makes people realize that, I appreciate that. But what I don’t like about religion is that once people accept Jesus or whatever, they think they’re more enlightened than everyone else. Like, by accepting the fact that they’re stupid sinners, they’ve become better than everyone else. And they turn into assholes.

Pause.

ELDER THOMAS

I don’t really know what to say. I have some pamphlets—

ELLIE

Hold still.

ELDER THOMAS

What?

ELLIE takes out her iPhone, takes a picture of ELDER THOMAS.

ELDER THOMAS

Why did you just do that?

ELLIE

Are you coming back tomorrow?

ELDER THOMAS

I don’t—I’m not sure—

ELLIE

Come back tomorrow, I’ll be here around the same time.

ELDER THOMAS

I’m sorry, what’s happening?

CHARLIE comes out of the bathroom with his walker, sees ELDER THOMAS.

CHARLIE

Oh.
Hi, Charlie. I was just—

ELDER THOMAS

ELLIE takes a picture of CHARLIE, then puts the iPhone back in her bag.

ELLIE

Will you have that done by tomorrow?

CHARLIE

Sure.

ELLIE

Five page minimum.

CHARLIE

I know. It’ll be good, I promise.

ELLIE extends a hand to ELDER THOMAS.

ELLIE

I’m Ellie.

ELDER THOMAS

(Elder Thomas)

(shaking her hand)

Ellie.

ELLIE

Weird. See you later.

ELLIE exits. CHARLIE and ELDER THOMAS look at one another.

ELDER THOMAS

Are you ready to hear about the Church?

Pause.

CHARLIE

Yes.
LATER THAT AFTERNOON.

CHARLIE sits in the same position as before,
ELDER THOMAS holds some pamphlets.
CHARLIE is glancing through one of them absent-mindedly.

ELDER THOMAS
It was written by prophets, pretty much in the same way that the Bible was written.
Through revelation and prophecy by the Nephite prophet Mormon, who lived in the
Americas in the fourth century. He transcribed the history of his people onto a set of
golden plates, and then hundreds of years later Joseph Smith, a man from upstate New
York, translated the book from the gold plates in about sixty-five days or so—

CHARLIE
You go to the church near the highway, right? The older one, the one by the U-haul?

ELDER THOMAS
Um—yeah. And to translate this book in sixty-five days is pretty remarkable because it
means he had to translate the equivalent of about eight single-spaced pages per day—

What’s your name?

Pause.

I told you. It’s Elder Thomas.

CHARLIE
But what’s your real name?

ELDER THOMAS
Thomas.

CHARLIE
That’s your last name, right? What’s your first name?

ELDER THOMAS
You don’t need to know my first name.

CHARLIE
Oh.

Pause.
ELDER THOMAS
What's also really incredible is that the Book of Mormon actually contains many distinct
literary styles, including ancient Hebrew poetry and—

CHARLIE
Why is that incredible?

ELDER THOMAS
Well, it—how would some farm boy living in upstate New York have known how to
write in the style of ancient Hebrew poetry? It's living proof of God's intervention.

CHARLIE
Hm.
(pause)
You know, actually—I know all this.

What do you mean?

ELDER THOMAS
I've read just about every Wikipedia article about Mormonism—

CHARLIE
I don't know if Wikipedia is the best source for—

ELDER THOMAS
I also read the Book of Mormon.

CHARLIE
The whole thing?

ELDER THOMAS
Sure. A couple times.

CHARLIE
Pause.

Did you—like it?

ELDER THOMAS
I thought it was... Devastating.

CHARLIE
Huh. Okay. I don't know about that.
CHARLIE
That one story about—Sherem? Sherem was questioning whether Jesus was actually God, so God struck Sherem down. And Sherem repented as he was dying, said that he was wrong, and so everyone believed in Jesus. God killed this man to—prove a point. That story, it's—devastating.

ELDER THOMAS
Yeah, that—I never thought about it like that, but—
(pause)
You know what I think is amazing? The Bible is great and everything, I mean—it's a really great way to come to understand God. But it's so—distant. This thing written thousands of years ago, on the other side of the planet, in languages we don't speak. It's been translated and translated, probably rewritten over and over and over. But the Book of Mormon—it's like, a direct link to God's word. One translator, writing in English, right here in America, just a few generations ago. It's—

Devastating.

ELDER THOMAS
No. No, it's—hopeful. It makes you feel like there's some meaning to being here, right now, in America. Do you see that?
(pause)
You're so close in time and space to God's revelation, Charlie, that should make you feel proud. It should inspire you. It should keep you from doing this to yourself.

Pause.

CHARLIE
I'm not interested in converting, Elder Thomas. I don't find the Mormon Church hopeful. I don't find it amazing, and I don't find the proof convincing.

ELDER THOMAS
Wait so why did you want me to—?
(pause)
Um. I want to just make sure that—. I want to make sure you know that I'm just coming over here to talk about the church. That's it.

CHARLIE
Well, yeah. What?

ELDER THOMAS
I just... I don't know if—
(pause, then suddenly)
You're not attracted to me, right?
CHARLIE

Oh my God.

ELDER THOMAS

It’s just, with the— What you were watching, the first time I came in here—

CHARLIE

I am not attracted to you. Please, understand me when I say that. I am not attracted to you. You’re a fetus.

(pause)

Is that what you really think of me?

ELDER THOMAS

No, I—

CHARLIE

No, really. Tell me the truth. Do you find me disgusting?

Pause.

ELDER THOMAS

No.

(pause)

It’s just that— you said you wanted to hear about the church.

CHARLIE

I did want to hear about the church. Your church, the one by the U-Haul, near the highway. I wanted to hear about that church.

ELDER THOMAS

I don’t understand.

CHARLIE

You can go now, I’m sorry if I—

ELDER THOMAS

Is this about your—? Your domestic—.

CHARLIE

How do you know about—?

ELDER THOMAS

Your friend, Liz—she told me, she said that your—whatever, he had gone to the church?

CHARLIE

Look, you don’t want to hear about this, you’re just a kid—
ELDER THOMAS

I’m not a kid, I’m nineteen.

(pause)

Charlie—I’ve been going door to door for a while, you know? But no one understands that—I want to get to know them. The good and the bad, everything. How are we supposed to talk about your spiritual life if I don’t know anything about who you are?

Pause. CHARLIE considers for a moment.

CHARLIE

His name—my partner’s name, it was Alan.

(pause)

It sounds strange, but he was actually a student of mine. He was only a couple years younger than me, he had gone back to school after his mission. His parents were trying to get him to marry someone from the church, I think he barely knew her. But he was gonna go through with it—until he met me. It was ridiculous, he was the engaged son of a Mormon bishop, I had a wife and kid at home. But we just—couldn’t stand to be apart.

(pause)

You really want me to keep going?

ELDER THOMAS

Yes. Really, yes.

CHARLIE

I thought he’d be able to get over all this religious stuff, but—... It got worse and worse, to the point where every time we’d drive by that church near the highway he’d start to hyperventilate. His parents had abandoned him, refused to talk to him at all. But one night, about ten years ago, his father showed up here and told Alan he just wanted him to go to church the next day. He said, “I’m giving the talk tomorrow and I’ve written it for you. If you never come again—just come to church tomorrow.” I told Alan not to go, but... The next morning he came home afterward, and he was just—hollow. It took him over, and he just—stopped everything. He stopped bathing, he stopped eating, he stopped sleeping. And a few months later, he was gone.

ELDER THOMAS

What happened? At the service?

CHARLIE

I don’t know. Alan wouldn’t tell me what they did to him. I guess—I was hoping you could find out.

Pause.

ELDER THOMAS

I don’t—I’m not even from here, I don’t know if—
CHARLIE

I know—nevermind. It’s ridiculous.

Pause.

ELDER THOMAS

I’m going to ask around, alright? I’ll see if anyone remembers that day, the last day he was there. Who knows, someone might remember.

CHARLIE

You’d do that?

ELDER THOMAS

Of course. I just want to help. That’s why I’m on a mission in the first place, right?

LIZ enters through the door with an extra wide wheelchair and a shopping bag.

LIZ

Alright, I got you something. I did some asking around, and this doctor said—

LIZ notices ELDER THOMAS.

What the hell, Charlie?

ELDER THOMAS

I was just—

Charlie?

LIZ

It’s fine, Liz.

CHARLIE

LIZ

What did I say about your stress level? You don’t need someone coming over and telling you that you’re going to hell.

ELDER THOMAS

I never said that, I would never say that.

LIZ

Leave.
Liz—

CHARLIE

LIZ

Get out.

ELDER THOMAS

Okay.

ELDER THOMAS heads for the door.

CHARLIE

Liz, stop it. He didn’t do anything to you, for Christ’s sake. He’s just a kid.

I’m nineteen.

ELDER THOMAS

(pause)

I’ll just go—

LIZ

Actually—stay. We’ll have a chat.

(to CHARLIE)

I brought you this.

CHARLIE

Thank you. What is it?

LIZ

What the fuck does it look like? It’s a fat guy wheelchair.

Why do I need a wheelchair?

LIZ

I was talking to one of the E.R. doctors, he told me that moderate activity would be a good idea. That a sense of independence would help you keep your spirits up. Now you don’t have to sit on that couch all day long.

CHARLIE

How much did you pay for this thing?

LIZ

Nothing. We ordered it specially for a patient a few months ago, it’s just been sitting around.
CHARLIE

What happened to the patient?

LIZ

Try it out. Now you can go to the bedroom by yourself, get to the bathroom more easily.

LIZ moves the wheelchair next to CHARLIE.

CHARLIE braces himself on his walker and manages to pull himself up.

LIZ positions the wheelchair behind CHARLIE, CHARLIE starts slowly backing into the wheelchair.

LIZ

(ala a truck backing up)

CHARLIE stops, looks back at her. LIZ smiles.

CHARLIE continues, then sits in the wheelchair, wheezing loudly. He tries it out, wheeling himself a few feet.

LIZ

Good?

CHARLIE

Yeah, it's—. It's actually nice.
(rolls a few more feet)
Thank you, Liz, it's really—

LIZ

Why don't you see if it fits through the bedroom door, you probably haven't been in there for days, right?

I should probably go—

ELDER THOMAS

LIZ

Not before we have our little chat.

ELDER THOMAS

Oh, I. What?
CHARLIE

Liz—

LIZ

(to CHARLIE)

Give us a few minutes.

LIZ pushes him toward the bedroom, out of the room. LIZ turns back to ELDER THOMAS, stares at him.

LIZ

Take a seat.

ELDER THOMAS sits down.

LIZ

So. Iowa?

ELDER THOMAS

What?

LIZ

You’re from Iowa.

ELDER THOMAS

Uh. Yes.

LIZ

What part?

ELDER THOMAS

Waterloo?

LIZ

You asking me?

ELDER THOMAS

No, I— I’m from Waterloo.

Pause. LIZ smokes.
LIZ
So listen. You're just a kid, you don't know anything. But I want to be very clear with you about a few things if you're going to keep coming over here.

(pause)
I know this is fun for you. You get to travel around, act superior to everyone else. Plus you get to go home, get married, get some boring job, have tons of kids, and when you die you get your own planet. It all sounds pretty awesome. But, there are other kinds of people. People like Charlie, for whom this amazing plan doesn't fit. You can't fit a round peg in a square hole, and you certainly can't fit a morbidly obese gay peg in a Mormon hole. That came out wrong.

(pause)
Point is—you're a sweet kid, but he doesn't need this right now.

ELDER THOMAS
I disagree.

Pause.

Excuse me?

LIZ

ELDER THOMAS
Sorry, I just—I think this is exactly what he needs right now. He's refusing to go to the hospital, he's dying—what he needs is some spiritual guidance.

LIZ
And you're gonna give him that?

ELDER THOMAS
No. God will.

LIZ
I see.

(pause)
My big brother went on a mission. Went to Switzerland.

ELDER THOMAS
Oh.

LIZ
Yeah. He was the good kid. I however was the black sheep—by the time I was thirteen, I refused to go to church, told my dad I didn't believe in God. Even had to move out of the house, went to live with my aunt and uncle in Boise until I graduated. But not my big brother—he was a good Mormon.

(CONTINUED:)
LIZ (cont.)
He wrote me a letter a few months into his mission, he told me he was cold all the time. That he was cold all the time, and lonely, but he preferred being out there in Switzerland because he didn’t want to come back and get married.

ELDER THOMAS

He didn’t want to—?

LIZ
Dad had set it all up, pushed him into getting engaged to this girl from the church he barely knew. When he came back, he refused to go through with the wedding. Fell in love with someone else, started a whole new life. Until one day, when he went back to the church—I don’t know what the hell they did to him that day, but it sure fucked him up. And after that he just started wasting away until he was just—gone.

(pause)
That was my brother. Alan. My big brother who was crushed under the church that you think can save Charlie.

ELDER THOMAS

Oh.

Silence. LIZ stares at him, smoking.

I’m sorry.

LIZ
What the fuck are you sorry about?

(pause)
Where’s your companion?

ELDER THOMAS

What?

LIZ
You always have to be in pairs. I know that. It’s sort of a big deal for you to be out here alone, isn’t it?

Pause.

ELDER THOMAS
Elder Johnson. He’s—not feeling well.

LIZ
Not feeling well?
ELDER THOMAS

Why does it matter?

LIZ

It’s a pretty big deal for you guys not to—

ELDER THOMAS

Well, to be honest, he’s having some—problems and he’s pretty useless right now, but I thought I could do some good. By myself. Help just one person.

LIZ

And that one person is Charlie.

ELDER THOMAS

Yes.

CHARLIE comes out of the bedroom. LIZ doesn’t notice him.

LIZ

Listen to me. He doesn’t need your help, he doesn’t want saving. In a few days he’s probably going to be dead, and right now what he needs is for you to leave him alone. I am the only person who knows how to take care of him, do you understand? I am the only one who can save him.

CHARLIE

Liz.

LIZ turns around, sees CHARLIE. ELDER THOMAS quickly gathers his things and exits. LIZ forces a smile.

LIZ

Everything go alright in there? (no response)

I’ve got an hour or so before I need to get back, we could watch some Maury. Wheel yourself over here, c’mon.

LIZ turns on the television. CHARLIE stares at her, not moving.
NIGHT.

CHARLIE, alone, in his wheelchair. He is laying some blankets out for the night onto the couch. He’s about to try to move onto the couch, when he notices ELLIE’s notebook. He wheels himself over to it, picks it up, opens it.

CHARLIE (reading)
“This apartment smells. This notebook is retarded. I hate everyone.”

CHARLIE looks at it for a moment, smiling.

CHARLIE
“This apartment smells. This notebook is retarded. I hate everyone.”

CHARLIE laughs a little. The laugh quickly turns into a cough, which produces pain in his chest. He takes a few breaths, trying to calm himself down.

CHARLIE (soft)
I felt saddest of all when I read the boring chapters that were only descriptions of whales, because I knew that the author was just trying to save us from his own sad story, just for a little while. This apartment smells.

CHARLIE takes a few deep breaths, wheezing. The pain starts to subside.

CHARLIE
This apartment smells. This notebook is retarded. I hate everyone. The author was just trying to save us from his own sad story, just for a little while. I hate everyone. The author was just trying to—

Lights quickly snap to black.

In the darkness, once again we hear the sound of waves—louder now, and more distinct, building a little in volume before lights rise on:
THURSDAY

MORNING.

CHARLIE sits on the wheelchair, in front of his laptop, speaking into the microphone.

CHARLIE
KimmyBallz429, I read your recent post on the discussion forum about strategies for coming up with a good thesis. You said that I want you to “just pick a sentence from the book and say it’s good or some shit”.

(pause)
I think I owe you all an apology. I’ve been teaching you all to rewrite and rewrite and rewrite, to edit your thoughts and change them and make them clearer, more precise, more objective. And I’m starting to realize that that’s horseshit. You don’t have any true reaction to these books because I’ve taught you to edit your reactions, to reshape them and reconfigure them over and over. And after all that, you don’t even have a reaction at all. You just end up hating it.

(pause)
How about this? Don’t write about the book. Forget the assignment, forget the readings. Hell, forget everything you know about what makes a good essay and just—write. Just sit down, and write me something. Just give me something honest. Okay?
LATER THAT MORNING.

ELLIE stands by the door, holding an essay.

ELLIE

So it’s good?

CHARLIE

It’s really, really good.

ELLIE

What grade am I gonna get?

CHARLIE

It’s a really good essay.

ELLIE

Yeah, whatever. Okay bye.

ELLIE turns to the door.

CHARLIE

I was hoping you could write a little more in your notebook.

ELLIE

Oh my God.

CHARLIE

You’ve only written a couple sentences so far—could you write me some more?

ELLIE

I kind of hate you.

CHARLIE

Yeah, but you hate everyone.

(pause)

Look, just keep going with what you were doing. Forget the poem, forget about writing an essay. Just keep going, write about whatever you want, whatever you’re thinking—

ELLIE

Shut up, just give me the notebook.

CHARLIE hands ELLIE the notebook, she sits down, opens the notebook. She is about to write, then looks at CHARLIE.
ELLIE
My mom found out. That I’m coming here.

Pause.

CHARLIE
How?

ELLIE
Small town bullshit. Her friend Judy saw the car parked outside here.
(pause)
She asked me how big you were.

CHARLIE
She knows that I—?

ELLIE
She just heard you gained weight. She doesn’t know you’re a monster.
(pause)
She made me promise to stop coming over.

CHARLIE
Did you tell her about the money?

ELLIE
I’m not retarded.

Pause. ELLIE writes a bit, CHARLIE watches her.

CHARLIE
I was in a strange place in my life when I married your mom.

Did I fucking ask?

ELLIE
Sorry. I just thought you… I’m sure your mom has told you the whole story anyway.

ELLIE
No, she hasn’t, she doesn’t like talking about you. Ever. But I’m pretty sure I know the story anyway. You come home one day, “Oh, honey, I’m so repressed, I need to self-actualize or some stupid shit.” And mom starts screaming, then you’re on the floor, just like I remember, looking pathetic and fat. Is that it?

Pause.
I understand that you’re angry.

Oh my God.

But you don’t need to be angry at the entire world. I’m the asshole, just be angry at me, don’t take it out on—

You think you’re the only person who’s ever fucked me over? Trust me, I have a list. And you’re no more important than any other asshole that’s treated me like dirt.

You could have sent her money, you know.

What?

If you have all that money. You could have been sending money to my mom.

I did.

I mean more than just child support.

Long silence.

I did.

(pause)

I’m so sorry, Ellie. I’m so, so sorry.

Then goes back to writing. A few moments pass. ELLIE puts the pen down, looks at CHARLIE.

I’m hungry.
Pause.

CHARLIE
There’s stuff for sandwiches in the kitchen.

ELLIE
Okay.
(pause)
I’ll make you one, but it’s going to be small. And I’m only using turkey or chicken, and no mayonnaise.

Pause.

Thank you.

CHARLIE

ELLIE gets up, goes into the kitchen.

What were you writing about?

ELLIE
I was writing about how when you die, you won’t fit through the door or the windows. So they’ll probably have to take you out in pieces.

ELLIE exits into the kitchen.
AFTERNOON.

CHARLIE is asleep in his wheelchair. ELLIE is sitting on the couch typing on CHARLIE’s laptop, smoking pot from a small glass pipe.

A knock at the door.

ELLIE puts the pipe in CHARLIE’s hand. CHARLIE doesn’t wake up.

ELLIE

Yeah?

ELDER THOMAS

(from outside)

I, uh—hello?

ELLIE pauses for a second, recognizing the voice, then takes the pipe out of CHARLIE’s hand. She goes to the door, opening it. ELDERR THOMAS stands in the doorway holding his bicycle helmet.

ELLIE

What?

ELDER THOMAS

Oh, I—

ELLIE

What?

ELDER THOMAS

Hi.

(see the pipe)

Are you—?

ELLIE

I’m bored. Come inside.

ELDER THOMAS

Maybe I should—

ELLIE

Oh my God stop talking. Take that nametag off, I told you, you look like a retard.
ELLIE closes the door behind ELDER THOMAS.

ELDER THOMAS
(seeing CHARLIE)

Is he...?

ELLIE

Do you ever finish sentences? He’s asleep.

ELDER THOMAS

I can come back.

ELLIE

He’ll be asleep for a while.

ELDER THOMAS

Oh. Is he okay?

ELLIE

I don’t know. I ground up some Ambien and put it in his sandwich.

ELDER THOMAS

Oh my God, is he—?

ELLIE

I only gave him a couple, he’s fine. I can take three at a time.

ELDER THOMAS

Why did you—? You have Ambien? Where did you get Ambien?

ELLIE

I had sex with a pharmacist. Just kidding, gross. My mom eats them like tic tacs. Do you ever wear anything different?

ELDER THOMAS

Should he be taking sleeping pills? He’s sort of sick and—

ELLIE

Yeah, anyway. Why is your name “Elder”?

ELDER THOMAS

It’s not my real... During the mission, we all get called “Elder”. My last name is Thomas, so—I’m Elder Thomas.

ELLIE

It makes you sound, like, important. Which you’re not.
ELLIE takes a hit from the pipe. ELDER THOMAS watches.

No, I’m not.

ELDER THOMAS

Does this make you nervous?

ELLIE

No, I—. Well, yeah, it does.

ELDER THOMAS

It’s just pot, it’s not like I’m smoking crack or anything. You probably have no idea what I’m talking about.

ELLIE

Don’t—. I know what you’re talking about. I know what drugs are.

ELDER THOMAS

You only think you know what drugs are because your parents told you a whole bunch of lies about them. You probably think that smoking pot will turn you into a homeless person or something.

ELLIE

You know, I’m not an idiot. I’ve smoked pot before.

ELDER THOMAS

Oo, I’m so impressed.

ELLIE

I’m not trying to impress you, I’m just saying—

You have not smoked pot.

ELLIE

Yes, I have. It was—kind of a problem.

ELLIE

A “problem”?

ELDER THOMAS

My bishop told me I had an addiction.
ELLIE
That is the stupidest fucking thing I have ever heard in my entire life.

ELLIE takes a hit, holds it in.

ELDER THOMAS
I was doing it every day. I had a problem.

ELLIE
You were a stoner. You had a hobby.

ELLIE exhales, blowing the hit in ELDER THOMAS’ face.

ELDER THOMAS
Okay, I’m leaving.

ELDER THOMAS gets up.

ELLIE
If you leave, I’ll feed him the rest of the pills I have in the bottle.

ELDER THOMAS stops.

ELLIE
What?

ELDER THOMAS
There’s probably twenty or thirty more. I’ll crush them up and mix them into some water and pour it down his throat.

ELDER THOMAS
Why would you say something like that?

ELLIE
Sit down.

ELDER THOMAS
You wouldn’t really do that, would you?

ELLIE
Oh my God sit down.

ELDER THOMAS pauses, then comes back to the couch and sits down.
ELLIE

Why do you keep coming back here?

ELDER THOMAS

He wants me to come over, he told me. He needs help.

ELLIE

That’s a stupid reason. Take a hit.

ELDER THOMAS

What? No.

ELLIE

You’ve never smoked before.

ELDER THOMAS

Yes, I have.

ELLIE

You’re some sheltered little Mormon boy, you haven’t done anything. You don’t know anything. God, I can’t even look at you.

ELDER THOMAS

Why do you talk like that, is this how you treat everyone?

ELLIE

Yeah. Why does he want to talk to you?

ELDER THOMAS

I think he needs God to be in his life right now.

ELLIE

That’s an even stupider reason. Do you think he wants to have sex with you? That’s so gross, oh my God. Take a hit.

ELDER THOMAS

He doesn’t want to—! I don’t want to take a hit!

ELLIE

Why are you such a pussy? You wear a bicycle helmet. Take a hit.

ELLIE shoves the pipe into ELDER THOMAS’ chest.

ELDER THOMAS

I told you—
ELLIE
If you don’t take a hit, I’m going to call the police and tell them you tried to rape me. Take a hit.

Pause.

ELDER THOMAS
I don’t understand you at all.

ELLIE
Oh my God.

ELDER THOMAS takes the pipe.

ELDER THOMAS
Is there a carb on this?

ELLIE
Oo, I’m so impressed.

ELDER THOMAS
I wasn’t trying to—

ELLIE
There isn’t a carb.

ELDER THOMAS takes a hit. He exhales.

ELLIE takes out her iPhone and snaps a quick picture ELDER THOMAS as he exhales.

ELDER THOMAS
(coughing)
What are you doing? Why did you just—?

ELLIE
Calm down. Take another hit.

ELDER THOMAS
What are you going to do with that picture?

ELLIE
I’m gonna masturbate to it, is that what you want me to say? You’re a pervert. Take another hit.
No response. ELDER THOMAS stares at her.

ELLIE
Look, I’m just fucking with you, alright? I’m not gonna kill anyone, I’m not gonna tell anyone you raped me. I don’t understand why people believe everything I say. People are such idiots, it’s so easy, it’s ridiculous.

ELDER THOMAS
You aren’t going to feed him more Ambien?

No.

ELDER THOMAS
Did you really put some in his sandwich?

ELLIE
That I did. Just a couple. So he’d stop bugging me.

ELDER THOMAS
Why don’t you just leave?

ELLIE
I don’t know.

ELDER THOMAS
If you hate him so much why do you keep coming over?

ELLIE
I’m done answering questions now.

ELDER THOMAS
Okay.

(silence)

Can I have another hit?

ELLIE
It goes against your religion, and that makes you a hypocrite. Go ahead.

ELDER THOMAS takes another hit—a big one.

ELDER THOMAS
I never really thought I had a problem. I did it every day for a while, then I stopped. If I was able to stop then how is it a problem?
ELLIE
That’s the only smart thing you’ve said since you came in here.

ELDER THOMAS
This is really good weed.

ELLIE
No it’s not. You just haven’t smoked in a while.

ELLIE takes another picture of him.

ELDER THOMAS
I really wish you wouldn’t do that.

ELLIE
Yeah, I heard you the first time. Do you find me attractive?

I—

ELDER THOMAS
Because I’m not attracted to you at all, just to let you know.

Pause.

ELLIE
Okay.

ELDER THOMAS
I’m not trying to be mean or anything. But I just don’t think you’re good looking or interesting. Or intelligent.

ELLIE
(a little hurt)

Oh.

ELLIE
Oh my God grow up. Maybe someone else finds you attractive, just not me. Maybe my dad finds you attractive.

ELDER THOMAS
I really wish you wouldn’t say that.

ELLIE
It’s so easy to make you uncomfortable, it’s a little sad. You can cash that out.
ELDER THOMAS
You don’t mind?

ELLIE
No.

ELDER THOMAS takes another big hit from the pipe. He’s pretty high by this point.

ELDER THOMAS
I don’t know if I’m going to be able to bike back to my apartment.

ELLIE
Wow, you’re pretty high, aren’t you?

ELDER THOMAS
Yes. Yes, I am. And if my parents knew I was getting high, that I was getting high while I was on my mission—

ELLIE
You’re not on a mission.

Pause.

What?

ELLIE
I said you’re not on a mission. Jesus.

(pause)
I remembered your name from your name-tag. The Mormon website has a search engine for, like, everything. Anyway, there was a list of twelve people on missions in northern Idaho, and you’re not one of them.

Pause.

ELDER THOMAS
They didn’t update the website.

ELLIE
I’m not a retard.

Pause.

ELDER THOMAS
I need to go.
ELLIE
You keep saying that. Why are you pretending to be a Mormon missionary?

ELDER THOMAS
I'm not—I am on a mission—

ELLIE
Oh my God.

ELDER THOMAS
I mean I—was. I was on a mission.

ELLIE
Here?

ELDER THOMAS
I have to go.

ELDER THOMAS stands up, a little shaky on his feet.

ELLIE
What happened?

ELDER THOMAS
Why do you care?!

ELLIE
Because I think we have a blossoming friendship.

Pause. ELDER THOMAS looks at her.

ELDER THOMAS
I thought you said I wasn't attractive or interesting or intelligent.

ELLIE
So?

ELDER THOMAS
So why would you want to be my friend?

ELLIE
Because everyone else I know is even less attractive, interesting, and intelligent than you.

Pause.
You won’t tell anyone?

ELLIE

Who am I gonna tell?

Pause. ELDER THOMAS goes back to the couch, sitting next to ELLIE.

ELDER THOMAS

I was in Eastern Oregon, in Pendleton. It’s where they do that big annual rodeo, the famous one—

ELLIE

I really, really don’t care about that.

ELDER THOMAS

Anyway, I was on my mission there. Last year.

ELLIE

What happened?

ELDER THOMAS

I left. I didn’t want to do it anymore.

(pause)

We just kept trying to talk to people, really engage with them, but most of the time they’d just talk to us for a little while, say “thank you”, and we’d never hear from them again. So after a while, it was like—what am I actually doing here? Am I really, like, really helping people?

ELLIE

No you were not.

ELDER THOMAS

I started to feel that way, too.

ELLIE

I don’t feel that way, I know that you weren’t helping people. Like, for a fact. It doesn’t help people to tell them how to believe in God. Why would that help people?

ELDER THOMAS

It might bring them eternal salvation.

ELLIE

Oh my God you actually think that?
ELDER THOMAS

Yeah... Maybe.

ELLIE

"Maybe"? You're shitty at being a religious person.

ELDER THOMAS

I just—I want to believe it. My family, all my friends, they seem like—totally happy. I wanna be like that.

ELLIE

So why did you come to Idaho?

ELDER THOMAS

I got kicked off the mission.

ELLIE

For smoking pot?

ELDER THOMAS

For assaulting my companion.

Pause.

ELLIE

You're full of shit.

ELDER THOMAS

No, I'm not.

ELLIE

Oh my God you so are.

ELDER THOMAS

Seriously.

ELLIE

So what, like, you went on a "pot bender"?

ELDER THOMAS

I wasn't smoking at all. The moment I stepped foot in Oregon, I made a promise to myself that I wouldn't smoke any more. And I didn't.

ELLIE

Which is a shame if it's your first time in Oregon. So why did you beat him up?
ELDER THOMAS
He just... He didn’t care. About anything. We’d go out every day, we’d try to talk to people, and no one would listen, and he didn’t even care. I tried to talk to him about different sections of town we could go to, different ways to engage them, different ways to help these people... But you could tell, if we spent our whole mission there ministering and hadn’t helped one single person, he wouldn’t have cared. His faith was just—. He didn’t need to earn it or prove it at all. And one day, we were out in this little farming community, and we weren’t helping anyone, and he kept complaining about being hungry, and how hot it was out that day, and—I just lost it. I went nuts.

He told me his parents would sue me, that I’d go to jail. All I wanted to do was finish this mission, I wanted to see Mormonism help one person. So, I just got on a bus. I still have a few thousand dollars left in my checking account. I went to the church here in town a couple times, I found this nametag in the common room.

ELLIE
You have like huge pores on your face, did you know you have huge pores?

ELDER THOMAS
Were you listening to me? Why did you just say that?

ELLIE
So what’s your real name?

ELDER THOMAS
Why do you want to know?

ELLIE
Because we’re friends now.

Pause.

ELDER THOMAS
Joseph Paulson.

ELLIE takes a picture of him.

ELLIE
You’re slightly more interesting now.

ELDER THOMAS
Thank you.

The door bursts open revealing MARY, a woman of about forty but who looks considerably older.
Shit.

ELLIE

MARY pushes past ELLIE, sees CHARLIE. She stops immediately. Long silence as she stares at CHARLIE. She moves toward him slowly.

Mom—

ELLIE

Shut up.

MARY

She stands next to CHARLIE, looking down at him.

Charlie.

MARY

CHARLIE doesn’t move.

Charlie.

MARY

No response. MARY looks at ELLIE. ELLIE looks away.

Yeah okay sorry.

ELLIE
LATE AFTERNOON.

CHARLIE sits in his wheelchair, awake but very groggy. LIZ is attaching an oxygen tank to the wheelchair and running a hose over his ears and under his nose. MARY sits on the couch smoking a cigarette. ELLIE stands by the door, ELDER THOMAS in the opposite corner.

Thoughout the scene, CHARLIE’s breathing is much more shallow, and his wheezing is much worse.

LIZ

(to MARY)
You know, he’s not breathing so good. Second-hand smoke isn’t really a great idea.

She’s fine, Liz.

CHARLIE

What, are you a doctor?

LIZ

MARY

No, and neither are you.

MARY puts out the cigarette in an empty soda can. MARY stares at CHARLIE.

LIZ

Are you having more pain?

CHARLIE

Yes. Wheezing’s getting worse.

LIZ

How easy is it to move?

CHARLIE

Not very.

LIZ

How about any confusion? Have you felt disoriented, confused, forgotten where you are or what you’re doing?
No. Would that be bad?

CHARLIE

Yes. That would be very bad.

LIZ

So—am I okay?

CHARLIE

No, you’re not “okay”. But as far as the sleeping pills, you’re fine. I think she only gave you a couple.

LIZ

Yeah, that’s what I told you.

ELLIE

LIZ takes off the stethoscope, moves toward ELLIE.

LIZ

Listen to me. I was a very angry, very stupid little girl once too, but this goes beyond smoking pot and posting shit on the internet. If you would have given him more pills than that, you could have—

ELLIE

Yeah, except I didn’t give him more than that, I gave him two pills.

MARY

(to ELLIE)

Ellie, how much money did he offer you?

CHARLIE

Mary. Don’t.

MARY

(to CHARLIE)

All of it? It would have to be all of it. It would take quite a lot of money to make that girl do something she doesn’t want to do.

ELLIE

How do you know about—?

MARY

(to ELLIE)

You think I’m an idiot? You think for one second I would believe that you were coming here out of the kindness of your heart?
ELLIE
You're not getting any of it. He said I could have all of it.

LIZ
Charlie doesn't have any money. I do all his shopping, I know exactly how much is in his checking account.

Pause.

MARY
(to CHARLIE)
She doesn't know?

CHARLIE
Mary—

MARY
(to LIZ)
Where do you think all the money from his teaching has been going? The account for Ellie—by now it has to be huge.

(to CHARLIE)
Over a hundred thousand at least, right?

LIZ
(to CHARLIE)
That isn't true, is it?
(pause)
Charlie, we could have gotten you anything you needed—special beds, physical therapists, fucking health insurance—... Last year when my car broke down, and I had to walk through the snow to get your groceries—

CHARLIE
I offered to get your car fixed—

LIZ
And I refused because I thought you had seven hundred dollars in your bank account.
(pause)
You had all that money that you were keeping a secret from me? Why were you doing that? What, you think I would try and take it from you?

CHARLIE
No, of course not, I... It's for Ellie. It's always been for Ellie.
(pause)
If there was ever some kind of emergency, I would have given you money—
LIZ
Would you? You’ve been keeping this from me for years, you really think I can trust you?

Pause. LIZ starts grabbing her things.

CHARLIE
Please don’t go.

LIZ exits. Pause.

ELLIE
Mom—you’re not getting any of my money.

Oh, shut up, Ellie. (pause)
Both of you, leave. Right now.

Pause.

ELLIE
I need the car keys.

MARY
You can walk.

ELLIE
It’s like two miles!

MARY
Do you really think that I care?

ELLIE
I hate you.

ELLIE exits. ELDER THOMAS moves out of the corner, moving toward CHARLIE.

ELLER THOMAS
I’ll come back.

CHARLIE looks at him.

CHARLIE
Yeah, okay.
ELDER THOMAS exits. A long moment of silence.

MARY stares at CHARLIE. She stands up, still looking at him. She circles his wheelchair, looking at him from all sides.

MARY

Jesus, Charlie.

Pause. MARY looks away. She takes a cigarette out of her purse, lights it up.

MARY

So this—heart thing. It’s serious, yeah?

CHARLIE

Pretty serious.

MARY

You gonna be okay?

Pause.

CHARLIE

I’ll be fine.

Pause.

MARY

Do you have anything?

What?

(charge)

Oh, uh—maybe, in the kitchen. There might be something in the cabinet over the stove, the highest shelf on the right.

MARY exits momentarily, returning with a bottle of vodka and a glass. She pours a large drink for herself, drinks.

MARY

Our deal was we’d wait until she was out of the house to give her the money.
CHARLIE
What’s the difference?

MARY
The difference is she’s seventeen and in high school. She’s going to spend it on ponies or marijuana or something.

CHARLIE
I think she’s a little smarter than that.

MARY
I really wish you wouldn’t have done this, Charlie. This is the last thing I need right now.

(taking a long drink)
How has it been? Getting to know her.

CHARLIE
She’s—amazing.

MARY chuckles.

MARY
You still do that.

What?

CHARLIE
That positivity. It’s so annoying.

MARY
(smiling)
Well, you’re a complete cynic, I was just trying to balance us out.

MARY
I guess I do miss that. That one thing.

CHARLIE
Just that?

MARY
That, and the cooking. Last month I tried to make a pie and I nearly set the entire apartment building on fire, Ellie threw all our pots and pans into the dumpster so I’d never try to do it again. You still cook?
CHARLIE
Not for years now. It's—hard for me to get into the kitchen.

Pause.

MARY
Charlie, I... I never knew you were doing this to yourself.

CHARLIE
You never asked me how I was doing.

MARY
You never asked me how I was doing either. Every month it's just, "how much money do you need?" and "how's Ellie?"

CHARLIE
You didn't tell me she was failing out of high school.

MARY
Well, now you know. I guess I just didn't need the lecture from you about my involvement in her education.

CHARLIE
That's not what I—

(long pause)
How are you doing, Mary?

Pause.

MARY
Fine.

CHARLIE
Are you working?

No.

MARY
Do you need me to send more money?

No.

Pause.
CHARLIE

It’s good to see you.

(pause)
Mary, I know that I screwed everything up. I know it must have been terrible. And humiliating. And I know that I’m not supposed to be around her—hell, you could call the police if you want to—

MARY

Christ, you really think I’d do that?

CHARLIE

You fought me pretty hard for full custody. And I don’t blame you, after what I did. But I just want to see her—I’ve always just wanted to see her. Is it so awful that she has a gay father?

MARY

No, actually, it’s not.

(pause)
She’s—awful, isn’t she?

CHARLIE

What?

MARY

Ellie. She’s awful. She’s a terror.

CHARLIE

No, she’s—she has a strong personality, but—

MARY

Charlie, she doesn’t even have any friends. Not a single one. She’s so cruel that no one at school will even talk to her.

(pause)
When she was nine, ten, I thought—I’m not giving him the satisfaction. I’m not letting him see this awful little girl and blame it all on me. No way.

CHARLIE

Wait, is that why you’ve been keeping her from me all this time? You thought I would think you were a bad mother?

MARY

At first. But later on—when she was fifteen, sixteen. I was worried she would hurt you.

CHARLIE

“Hurt” me? That’s ridiculous—
MARY
You’ve been around her for two days now, and already she’s almost killed you.
(pause)
I was protecting you, Charlie. You’ve always been so fucking sensitive, ready to break
down over anything… And here’s this girl—this girl who takes pleasure in hurting
people, this terrible girl.
(pause)
Believe me Charlie, I don’t take any pleasure in admitting it, I’m her mother for Christ’s
sake. I spent way too many years saying to myself, she’s just rebellious, she’s just
difficult. Charlie—she’s evil.

CHARLIE

She is not evil.

Pause. MARY goes to CHARLIE’s laptop, types.

What are you doing?

CHARLIE

MARY
Just—.

CHARLIE

If you’re gonna show me Ellie’s site, I’ve already seen it—

MARY

Did you see what she posted this morning?

MARY brings the computer to CHARLIE. CHARLIE looks at the screen.

MARY

When I saw this picture of you… I thought I should come over.

CHARLIE continues looking at the computer.

CHARLIE

(reading)
“There’ll be a grease fire in Hell when he starts to burn.”

Pause.

MARY

Don’t feel bad, I’ve made quite a few appearances on that little site of hers.
(pause)
You okay?
Pause.

CHARLIE

She's a strong writer.

MARY

That's your response?

CHARLIE

This isn't evil, this is honesty. Do you know how much bullshit I've read in my life?

MARY

My God, things never change. I don't understand you, Charlie.

CHARLIE

Every time I called you, I'd ask about her and you'd tell me she was doing fine. If she's so evil, why didn't you ever—

MARY

What was I supposed to tell you? That she was off treating her friends like dirt and slashing her teachers' tires? You didn't want to hear about that stuff.

CHARLIE

I could have helped her!

MARY

She doesn't want your help! She doesn't want anyone!

MARY gets up, wandering aimlessly around the room, drunk by this point and a little shaky on her feet.

CHARLIE

Mary, sit down.

MARY

You think I didn't want her to have a dad? She adored you. The only reason you married me in the first place was to have a kid, I know that.

Mary. Please.

CHARLIE

MARY stops, gets her drink and sits back down.
MARY
This brings back memories, doesn't it?
  (pause)
Listen. I... I never got to say that I was sorry.

CHARLIE
What would you have to be sorry about?

MARY
That's not what I mean, I... I mean about your—friend.

CHARLIE
Oh.
  (pause)
His name was Alan.

MARY
I know his fucking name, Charlie.
  (pause)
I saw him once, after you left. In the K-mart parking lot. I should have wanted to run
him over, or punch him in the face, but when I went up to him, he was so—... He was
carrying these bags, he could barely lift them, he was so thin. Looked like he was about
to fall over. I went up to him with all these amazing things I was going to say, hurl at
him like bricks. And I looked at him, and I—asked him if he wanted some help. He let
me carry a couple of bags to his car for him, he said thank you, and I left. I never even
told him who I was.
  (pause)
When I heard what happened, I thought about coming by. Bringing Ellie to see you. I
should have done that, I guess, and I'm sorry.

CHARLIE
It's okay. I'd be angry at me too.
  (pause)
But thank you. For saying that.

Pause.

MARY
You're wheezing.

CHARLIE
Yeah. It's gotten worse.

MARY
Are you having trouble breathing? Should I call someone?
CHARLIE

No, it's—

MARY

Let me hear.

MARY puts her ear to CHARLIE's chest, listening to him breathe.

CHARLIE

How do I sound?

(no response)

Today was the first time we were all together in fifteen years, you realize that?

(pause)

Back when Ellie was first born, we did that road trip to the Oregon Coast together. And we stayed in Newport, and Ellie loved the sand so much. You and I layed on the beach together, and Ellie played in the surf, and later that day I went swimming in the ocean. Last time I ever went swimming, actually. And I kept cutting my legs on the rocks, and the water was so cold, and you were so mad that my legs bled and stained the seats in the minivan. And you said for days after that I smelled like seawater. You remember that?

CHARLIE puts his hand on MARY's back as she listens. Silence.

MARY

You sound awful.

I'm dying, Mary.

MARY looks at him.

Fuck you.

MARY

I'm sorry.

CHARLIE

Fuck you.

MARY

For sure?

(pause)
CHARLIE

Yeah. For sure.

(pause)

Listen to me. I need to make certain that Ellie’s going to be okay. Beyond the money. She has to have someone around who won’t give up on her.

Pause.

MARY

You’ve been eating yourself to death for fifteen years and you’re saying that I gave up on her?

CHARLIE

I wanted to see her, Mary, I wanted to be a part of your life—both of your lives—

MARY

Go to the hospital, Charlie! You have money, go to the hospital!

CHARLIE

We both know that money is for Ellie. But beyond that, I have to make sure that she’s going to be alright, I have to be sure that she’s going to have a decent life, where people care for her and she cares for other people—... She doesn’t have anyone else, Mary.

MARY

(grabbing her things)

I have to... I need to go.

CHARLIE

I need to know I did one thing right in my life.

MARY heads to the door. Almost out the door, she stops, not looking at CHARLIE.

MARY

We both did our parts. I raised her, you’re giving her the money. It’s the best we could do.

(pause, still not looking at him)

Do you need anything before I leave? Water, or something?

Pause.

CHARLIE

No.

Pause.
MARY
Do you—... Do you want me to help you to the bathroom?

CHARLIE doesn’t respond. MARY waits for a beat, then exits.
NIGHT.

CHARLIE is asleep in his wheelchair. His wheezing has gotten much worse, and his breathing is shallow enough that it starts to effect his speech; he often has to pause mid-sentence to take a breath.

There is a loud knock at the door, CHARLIE wakes up with start, the sudden movement producing pain in his chest. He winces. Another loud knock.

Liz?

ELDER THOMAS

Can I come inside?

CHARLIE

What the hell are you—? Are you okay?

ELDER THOMAS

I’m fine, please let me come inside!

CHARLIE

Yes, just—!

ELDER THOMAS enters.

CHARLIE

Are you—? What’s wrong?

ELDER THOMAS

I’m sorry, I’m really, really, really high.

CHARLIE

Why are you high?

ELDER THOMAS

My parents called me tonight.

CHARLIE

So?
ELDER THOMAS
My parents found out where I am. They found out that I’m in Idaho.

CHARLIE
I don’t understand.

ELDER THOMAS
Your daughter, she sent pictures of me smoking pot to the mission in Oregon, and told them where I was. And my parents saw the pictures, and they called the church here in town, and they told them where I was staying, and I can’t figure out if she was trying to help me or hurt me. Do you ever get that feeling with her?

CHARLIE
I don’t. Really understand—

ELDER THOMAS
I thought my parents were going to disown me, and you know what they said? They said they loved me, they cared about me, and they wanted me to come home. How awful is that?

CHARLIE feels a sharp pain in his chest, he bends his head down in pain.

What’s wrong?

ELDER THOMAS
I’m fine.

No, you’re not.

ELDER THOMAS
It’s just… It’s going to go away, it just hurts—

CHARLIE
I just want to help. I know I can help you.

ELDER THOMAS
I’m not going to the hospital—

CHARLIE
I know. I won’t make you go. But I can help you.

ELDER THOMAS
Look, just go home to your family, if you need money for a bus or something—
ELDER THOMAS

I know what happened to Alan.

Pause.

CHARLIE

What?

ELDER THOMAS

I know what happened that day, at church, the last time he was there.

(pause)

I got an e-mail tonight, from Cindy Miller, from the church. She remembers. I had to come tell you right away.

Silence.

CHARLIE

What did they do to him?

Short pause.

ELDER THOMAS

The talk that day, the talk that his father gave—it was about *Jonah*.

Pause.

CHARLIE

What?

*Jonah and the whale.*

(pause)

Don’t you see? That essay you had me read to you—the one you like so much, the one about *Moby Dick*... Charlie, I get it now, I understand what God’s been doing with me here, I understand why he sent me to you; right when you needed help. This isn’t just a coincidence, when I read that e-mail—I knew I was helping you talk with God. It reaffirmed my faith.

(pause)

Jonah—it’s about refusing the call of God, you know? Jonah tries to escape from God’s will, he gets swallowed by a whale, and when he prays to God for help, God saves him by making the whale spit him out onto shore.

Silence.
CHARLIE laughs a little bit, the laughter causing pain in his chest.

CHARLIE
Is this what it fucking comes down to? I always thought, whatever they did to him that day must have been so awful, so cruel... A story? Some stupid story, that's what killed him?

ELDER THOMAS
No, it's not just a story—

CHARLIE
Look, I appreciate what you're trying to do, but this doesn't mean anything, it—. I don't even know what I was expecting to find out, it's not—

ELDER THOMAS
Listen to me.

(short pause)
Charlie, your boyfriend—he tried to escape God's will, he chose his lifestyle with you over God. And when he heard this story, when he heard God's word, he knew. He knew the truth. He never prayed for salvation—but it's not too late for you.

Pause.

CHARLIE
You think Alan died—because he chose to be with me? You think God turned his back on him because he and I were in love?

Yes.

ELDER THOMAS
Silence. CHARLIE stares at him.

CHARLIE
You know, I wasn't always this big.

Short pause.

Yeah, I know—

ELDER THOMAS

CHARLIE
I mean, I was never the best looking guy in the room, but—Alan still loved me. He still thought I was beautiful.
ELDER THOMAS

Okay—

CHARLIE

Halfway through the semester, he started meeting me during my office hours—we were both crazy about one another, but we waited until the course was done before we...

ELDER THOMAS

This isn’t important—

CHARLIE

It was just after classes had ended for the year, it was a perfect temperature, and we went for a walk in the arboretum. And we kissed.

ELDER THOMAS

Charlie, stop.

CHARLIE

Listen to me. We used to spend entire nights lying next to one another, naked—

ELDER THOMAS

Stop.

We would make love—

ELDER THOMAS

I don’t want to hear about—

CHARLIE

*We would make love.* Do you find that disgusting?

ELDER THOMAS

Charlie, God is ready to help you, you don’t have to—

CHARLIE

*I hope there isn’t a God.*

(pause)

I hope there isn’t a God because I hate thinking that there’s an afterlife, that Alan can see what I’ve done to myself, that he can see my swollen feet, the sores on my skin, the patches of mold in between the flaps—

ELDER THOMAS

Okay, *stop*—
CHARLIE
—the infected ulcers on my ass, the sack of fat on my back that turned brown last year—

ELDER THOMAS

Stop.

CHARLIE

This is disgusting?

YES.

I'm disgusting?

ELDER THOMAS

YES, YOU’RE DISGUSTING, YOU’RE—

ELDER THOMAS stops himself.

Long silence. CHARLIE stares at him.

CHARLIE

Go home to your family.

Pause. ELDER THOMAS exits. CHARLIE breathes heavily, wheezing, trying to calm himself down.

The lights quickly snap to black.

In the darkness, the waves are heard once again—this time definite, sharp, and aggressive, rising quickly in volume until lights rise on:
FRIDAY

MORNING.

CHARLIE, at his computer, speaking into a microphone. A small web cam rests next to his laptop, not hooked up. CHARLIE is noticeably weaker, and is having trouble maintaining his line of thought.

CHARLIE

So, here we are. Your complaints have been heard. The powers that be have decided to replace me with someone else—someone more “stable” and “traditional” as the e-mail to me said. This person will no doubt make you rewrite and rewrite and rewrite, just like I did for seventeen years, analyzing every word, every punctuation mark for clarity and precision of meaning, and...

(pause)

You all sent me your essays. Your new essays, the ones you didn’t rewrite. The ones you didn’t think about, and...

CHARLIE types for a second, pulling up something on his computer.

CHARLIE

KristyStar9, you wrote: “My parents want me to be a radiologist, but I don’t even know what that is,” Peter6969, you wrote: “I’m sick of people telling me that I have promise.” AdamD567, about two pages in, you wrote: “I think I need to accept that my life isn’t going to be very exciting.” You all wrote these—amazing, things, I just—

(pause)

I want to be honest with you now. I’ve been just a voice to all of you all semester, and now you’ve been so honest with me, I just...

CHARLIE pauses, then plugs the web cam into his computer. He stares at it for a second. He moves the camera away from him, then tilts it down, filming his body. He brings the camera back up to his face.

CHARLIE

These assignments—they don’t matter. This course doesn’t matter. College doesn’t matter. These beautiful, honest things you wrote—they matter.

CHARLIE pauses a second, then throws his computer and the camera across the room. They crash against the wall.
AFTERNOON.

CHARLIE is sitting in his wheelchair. LIZ stands in the doorway, staring at the broken computer, holding her bag.

I’m sorry.

CHARLIE

LIZ

Don’t.

LIZ makes her way inside, closes the door slowly. She moves over to CHARLIE.

Liz—

CHARLIE

LIZ

I said don’t.

LIZ stares at him for a second. She reaches into her bag, pulling out a stethoscope. She puts it on, then moves toward CHARLIE, putting it on his chest.

Breathe in.

CHARLIE breathes in.

More.

LIZ

I can’t. Hurts.

CHARLIE

LIZ takes the stethoscope off, puts it back in her bag. She looks at CHARLIE.

I really hate you for putting me through this again, you know that?

(pause)

Those last few months before Alan… And I’d come over here, and I’d scream at him, shake him. For God’s sake, eat something! You stupid piece of shit, you just need to eat something!

(Continued:)
LIZ (cont.)

(pause)
I'd come back and the food would be gone. Not because he ate it—but because he hid it somewhere. Threw it out the window, fed it to the neighbor's dog. You were beside yourself, had no idea what to do... God, that was awful.

CHARLIE

It was awful for me, too.

LIZ

Well, you weren't the one who found him. In your bed, underneath the covers, curled up like a fetus. God, you think you only see things like that in documentaries.

LIZ reaches into her bag, taking out two sub sandwiches.

LIZ

I got you two meatball subs. Extra cheese. I don't know what I'm doing.

(pause)
You have money. You need to go to the hospital.

Pause.

CHARLIE

No.

LIZ

For me. Go to the hospital for me.

No.

CHARLIE

Pause.

LIZ

How dare you do this to me again?!

Silence. CHARLIE's breathing is increasingly shallow.

The sound of waves from before is heard at a very low level, steadily increasing in volume as the scene progresses.

CHARLIE

She helped him.
LIZ

What?

CHARLIE

She wasn’t trying to hurt him. She was trying to help him.

LIZ

Who are you talking about?

CHARLIE

The Mormon kid. He’s going home. She did that. She wasn’t trying to hurt him.

LIZ

Oh, God, Charlie?

CHARLIE

She didn’t do it to hurt him, she did it to send him home.

LIZ

Do you feel light-headed? Charlie, look at me.

She was trying to help him!

LIZ

Who?!

CHARLIE

Ellie. She was trying to help him, she just wanted him to go home.

LIZ

Oh my God. You need—. I don’t know what to do, I can’t help you!

CHARLIE looks at LIZ.

CHARLIE


ELLIE charges in through the front door holding the essay from before. She stops when she sees CHARLIE, looking at him for a brief moment.

ELLIE

What’s wrong with him?
He's dying.

LIZ

Pause.

ELLIE

So call someone.

CHARLIE

No.

ELLIE

Call an ambulance.

CHARLIE

No. Liz. Please don't.

ELLIE

Call a fucking ambulance!

LIZ takes her cell phone out.

LIZ

Liz. Please.

CHARLIE

No. I'm not letting this go on any more, I'm calling an ambulance. I'm not going through this again!

ELLIE

I need to talk to him.

LIZ starts dialing.

LIZ

So talk.

ELLIE

Alone.

LIZ

I'm not leaving you alone with him.

ELLIE

I need to talk to him alone!
Liz. Please.

CHARLIE

LIZ looks at him. Pause.

LIZ

Fine. I'm calling an ambulance, and I'm waiting downstairs. We'll get you to the hospital, and you're going to be fine. You understand me?

LIZ exits.

ELLIE

What's wrong with you?

I can't. Breathe very well.

Pause.

ELLIE

The ambulance is coming. They'll take you to the hospital, you should have gone a while ago.

(pause)

Why did you do that?!

CHARLIE

What?

ELLIE holds up the essay.

ELLIE

I failed.

CHARLIE

It's. A really good essay.

ELLIE

No, it's not a really good essay! I failed!

(pause)

Are you just trying to screw me over one last time before you die? I don't care that you're dying! I don't care about you! Do you want me to fail out of high school, is that why you did this?

CHARLIE

I didn't. Write it.
ELLIE

This is the essay you gave me yesterday.

CHARLIE

You didn’t. Read it.

ELLIE

I don’t need to read it, it got an F!

CHARLIE

Read it.

ELLIE looks at the paper for a second.

This is… I know what this is.

ELLIE

I knew you would. You never. Forget anything.

ELLIE

I wrote this. (pause)

I wrote this in eighth grade for English, why do you—?

CHARLIE

And I felt saddest of all. When I read the boring chapters. That were only descriptions of whales. Because I knew. That the author was just trying to save us. From his own sad story. Just for a little while.

ELLIE

Why do you have this?

CHARLIE

Your mother. She sent it to me. Four years ago. I wanted to know how you were doing. In school. So she sent it. And it’s the best essay. I’ve ever read.

Pause.

ELLIE

Why are you fucking with me like this?
CHARLIE
I'm not.
(pause)
You're so beautiful. Ellie, you're beautiful.

ELLIE
Stop saying that.

CHARLIE
You're amazing. This essay. Is amazing.

ELLIE
Stop saying that!

CHARLIE
You're the best thing. I've ever done.

CHARLIE has a severe chest pain, he doubles over.
ELLIE is frantic.

ELLIE
What's the matter?!

Ellie.

CHARLIE
I can't be here right now, I have to go, I can't—

CHARLIE
You're perfect. You'll be happy. You'll care for people.

ELLIE
The ambulance is coming, they'll help you!

CHARLIE
No. They won't.

Pause.

ELLIE
You're going to the hospital.

CHARLIE
No.
ELLIE
You just need surgery or something!

CHARLIE
Read it to me.

ELLIE
What?!

CHARLIE
If you want to help. Read it to me. You can help me. If you read it.

ELLIE
is holding back tears at this point.

ELLIE
You asshole. You fat fucking asshole!

CHARLIE
You’ll help. If you read it.

ELLIE
Fuck you.

CHARLIE
Please.

ELLIE
Fuck you!

CHARLIE
Ellie.

ELLIE
Dad, please.

Pause. ELLIE looks at CHARLIE, pleading. ELLIE and CHARLIE are in the same position as they were in their first scene together. The sound of waves gets louder and louder.

ELLIE
(reading)
"In the amazing book Moby Dick by the author Herman Melville, the author recounts his story of being at sea. In the first part of his book, the author, calling himself Ishmael, is in a small sea-side town and he is sharing a bed with a man named Queequeg."
CHARLIE smiles at ELLIE through the pain. He reaches up and takes the oxygen tube out of his nose.

ELLIE

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

CHARLIE braces himself on his wheelchair.

ELLIE

"In the course of the book, the pirate Ahab encounters many hardships. His entire life is set around trying to kill a certain whale."

Wheezing heavily and with a huge amount of effort and pain, CHARLIE manages to stand up.

ELLIE

"I think this is sad because this whale doesn’t have any emotions, and doesn’t know how bad Ahab wants to kill him."

CHARLIE, staring at ELLIE, manages to take one step forward. His breathing becomes quicker. The waves are louder still.

ELLIE

"He’s just a poor big animal. And I feel bad for Ahab as well, because he thinks that his life will be better if he can kill this whale, but in reality it won’t help him at all."

CHARLIE takes another step. His breathing is more and more rapid.

ELLIE

"I was very saddened by this book, and I felt many emotions for the characters."

Another step.

ELLIE

"And I felt saddest of all when I read the boring chapters that were only descriptions of whales, because I knew that the author was just trying to save us from his own sad story, just for a little while."

CHARLIE takes one last step toward ELLIE. The waves reach their loudest level.
ELLIE
"This book made me think about my own life, and then it made me feel glad for my—"

CHARLIE looks up. The waves cut off.

A sharp intake of breath. The lights snap to black.

END OF PLAY.