

CRAZY S.O.B.

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. ROAD WITH SNOW PLOWED UP ON EITHER SIDE - DAY

A car careens around a curve and fishtails left and right. It flies over a hill, and standing on the road before it is a deer.

The driver MANFRED SMITH, ordinary in almost every way, jerks the wheel to his left to avoid the deer, and his tires run off the side of the road.

He over corrects and runs off the other side as the deer jumps to safety.

He runs off the road and hits a ditch.

His car flies through the air and lands on a frozen lake. Ducks standing on the lake scatter, sliding everywhere as the car does several 360s before coming to a stop.

Manfred cautiously opens the door and steps on the ice.

MANFRED

God, if I believed in you, I'd  
thank you that I'm still alive.

His feet slip out from under him and he falls on his ass.

A duck walks over to him with a wing kind of folded as if it has been broken.

Manfred wipes tears from his eyes.

MANFRED (CONT'D)

You poor thing. You should have  
ducked.

He LAUGHS and then picks up the duck.

Loud CRACKING noise.

Manfred sees that the ice is cracking beneath him.

MANFRED (CONT'D)

Oh, shit.

INT. TEACHER'S LOUNGE/HALLWAY - DAY

The lounge where the communication teachers hang out is an old journalism room.

Tables sit around the center of the room, but off that room is a smaller room that was once a dark room.

Manfred sits with ERIC HOLDMAN, who has a literature book sitting in front of him and BEV BOSLEY, youngish, also with a literature book, a stack of papers in front of her.

Lunch sacks and bottles clutter the table.

MANFRED

That's the way I feel sometimes. My mind and my body racing, the feeling I'm totally out of control, and then wanting to cry.

Bev looks up from her papers.

BEV

Maybe the deer is a symbol for your students.

ERIC

No. He would have run its ass over. Besides, what about the ducks?

BEV

Maybe they symbolize people he has hurt in the past, and his guilt is the cracking ice.

ERIC

Bev, that's bullshit.

BEV

Or maybe Manfred is just a crazy S.O.B.

MANFRED

Thank you for all the support.

BEV

If you want my support, grade my papers.

Eric stands.

ERIC

Drama class. Dumping ground for every lost soul who can't find a place fifth hour.

He leaves the room.

BEV

Now that he's gone, maybe we can be a little more serious.

MANFRED

Oh?

Bev reaches across the table and puts her hand on top of his.

He stares at her, puppy love expression on his face.

BEV

Seriously, Manfred, if you really do feel as if you don't have control of your emotions, maybe you ought to see some kind of counselor.

She pats his hand. Kindly ...

BEV (CONT'D)

Maybe you should teach drama since you live it every day.

MANFRED

No way!

She pulls her hand away quickly, then says

BEV

Drama isn't as bad as public speaking. One boring speech after another.

KALLY JONES, younger than the others, always busy and in movement, almost antsy, enters the room.

KALLY

There you are. Bev, I hope he's not bothering you with stories about his hard life.

MANFRED

Why would I do that?

KALLY

Because you're a big baby. I'm glad I caught you. I thought we could eat lunch together.

MANFRED

Some other time. I have papers to grade.

Manfred stands and walks toward the door with Bev walking beside him.

When they get out in the hallway, Bev turns to him.

BEV

You do know ... your girlfriend ... can be a big bitch.

MANFRED

I'm kind of committed.

BEV

You're only as committed as you allow yourself to be.

Manfred and Bev pass some students in the hallway. One, TESSA LONG, confident and well dressed, strides up to them, makes it a point to single out Manfred when she talks.

TESSA

I can't wait for the play tryouts, Mr. Smith.

Manfred gives her a quizzical, why should I care, look.

MANFRED

Good for you, Tessa.

Tessa looks at him like he's weird. Starts to say something. Shrugs and walks away.

MANFRED (CONT'D)

She's just like jock itch.

BEV

Jock itch?

MANFRED

Annoying as hell, hard to get rid of, and makes my butt itch.

Bev CHUCKLES. They walk on down the hall. Reach the main office's door.

The principal, DAVID MILBURN, sticks his head out the door.

DAVID  
Smith, I need to talk to you.

Slams the office door.

MANFRED  
I'm being called to the principal's  
office.

BEV  
Be careful; someone might spank  
you.

She walks down the hall.

MANFRED  
I think she likes me.

Pauses at the door briefly.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

CAROL CLEERLY, main secretary, smiles at him. SHERRY STEVENS,  
assistant CLAPS.

CAROL  
Never in the history of Hill Street  
High School have our students  
performed so well on the BAT test.

SHERRY  
And it's all because of you.

David steps out of his office with a sheaf of papers.

DAVID  
These scores are unbelievable, Mr.  
Smith.

He reaches out and shakes Manfred's hand.

DAVID (CONT'D)  
You are unbelievable, Mr. Smith, a  
valuable member of our team, and we  
reward valuable team members.

David hands Manfred a business sized envelop.

Manfred pulls something from the envelope that looks like  
money. He stares at them, his eyes grow wide, and a huge  
smile splits his face.

MANFRED  
Pizza Hut coupons!

INT. OUTSIDE OFFICE DOOR - DAY

Manfred stands at the principal's door.

MANFRED  
Pizza Hut is better than sex.

The door opens on the word hut.

DAVID  
Pardon me?

MANFRED  
Nothing.

DAVID  
Why are you standing there? I said  
I needed to talk to you.

MANFRED  
I was... uh ... talking to Bev.

DAVID  
You can talk to Bev about sex on  
your own time.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Manfred and David walk into the office.

MANFRED  
I was pleased with the BAT scores.

DAVID  
Yeah, Yeah, I'm always happy when  
teaches do their jobs.

Manfred follows David into the inner sanctum of the  
principal's office.

David closes the door behind him, turns to look at Manfred,  
doesn't offer him a seat.

Manfred sits anyway, stares at his principal.

Even though it's only a few seconds, Manfred starts to get  
nervous. Taps his feet on the floor. Reaches forward and  
grabs a handful of candy sitting on top of David's desk.

DAVID (CONT'D)  
Geez, Smith. Save some for  
everyone else.

Manfred drops the candy back in the dish, recoils as if he's  
been slapped.

DAVID (CONT'D)  
You may wonder why I've asked you  
here.

Manfred CHUCKLES nervously.

MANFRED  
I didn't think I was in trouble for  
anything.

DAVID  
You're not. ... Yet.

David sits up. All motion ceases.

MANFRED  
I wasn't really talking about sex  
with Bev, I mean, I mean, I was  
talking about how Pizza Hut was  
better than sex.

DAVID  
I want you to direct the fall play.

Manfred stiffens, frowns.

MANFRED  
Eric always directs the fall play.

DAVID  
He's coaching cross country.

MANFRED  
I'm not qualified to direct --

DAVID  
You've published two plays.

MANFRED  
Three.

DAVID  
Whatever. You should know what  
you're doing.

MANFRED

That doesn't mean I'm qualified.  
Eric --

DAVID

Is a runner. He's the only one who  
can do cross country. Anyone can do  
a play.

MANFRED

I don't think it's that easy.

DAVID

There's a stipend for it.

Manfred leans forward, grabs candy. David frowns.

MANFRED

How much?

DAVID

\$500.

MANFRED

It's not worth it.

Manfred leans back in his seat as if to say. "I'm not doing  
this."

DAVID

Your contract says I can put you in  
any extra-curricular activity.

MANFRED

But that doesn't really mean --

David raises his hand in the stop gesture. Manfred does.

DAVID

Just put a damn play together.

He turns to some papers, dismisses Manfred who starts for the  
door, pauses, turns.

MANFRED

Any play?

DAVID

Just as long as it doesn't suck.

Manfred walks into the outer office.

No one even looks up to acknowledge him.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Manfred steps through the door.

Tessa waits for him.

TESSA  
What play are we doing?

MANFRED  
I don't know.

Pauses. Enlightenment.

MANFRED (CONT'D)  
One that I got published.

TESSA  
As long as it doesn't suck.

As she walks down the hall, Manfred scratches his butt.

KALLY (O.C.)  
You better not have jock itch.

Manfred jumps.

KALLY (CONT'D)  
What are you doing?

MANFRED  
Making money. See you tonight.

INT. AUDITORIUM - DAY

Manfred stands at the door just inside the auditorium.

As he walks slowly toward the stage, all the house lights go down and a single spotlight follows him.

APPLAUSE, softer at first and then louder as he gets closer and closer to the stage.

When he walks up the stage steps and moves toward the podium, the APPLAUSE is thunderous.

He steps behind a podium and raises his hands for quiet.

Like little ripples, the APPLAUSE begins to die down until it is just barely audible.

MANFRED

I want to thank everyone who made this Tony award for best director possible.

Another BLAST of APPLAUSE and roses fall on his head, and some are thrown from the audience.

One hits him in the eye.

He waves to the crowd, picks up one lone rose, and heads to the stage steps where

His feet slide out from under him and he BUMPS down the steps on his butt.

The lights are on, no flowers, no crowd, no applause.

MANFRED (CONT'D)

Who am I kidding?

Kally pokes her head in through the auditorium's side door.

KALLY

What are you doing in here?

MANFRED

I'm just, uh, just ...

KALLY

Late to your class. You better hurry. Your getting fired does not fit into my plans.

MANFRED

Plans?

KALLY

We'll talk tonight.

Door slams.

INT. MANFRED'S CLASSROOM - DAY

Manfred stands behind his podium. A handful of students sit in his class.

MANFRED

So what do you think about Carlos's "Red Wheelbarrow" poem?

Manfred looks up.

Only Tessa has her hand raised.

Manfred SIGHS. Looking at her is enough to get her started.

TESSA

I think the white chicken is people. The wheelbarrow is like a way out of the rut we're in, and the rain is like the barriers that scare the chicken from getting in the wheelbarrow. So, if you don't climb into the red wheelbarrow you don't go anywhere.

Manfred nods his head in a tired, bored manner.

MANFRED

I never thought of it that way.

A boy, RON HUNT, raises his hand. He has a buzz hair cut and he wears an AC-DC t-shirt.

MANFRED (CONT'D)

(Surprised.)

Ron?

RON

Maybe this guy Williams was just a farmer thinking about his farm.

MANFRED

Most poetry is a little deeper than that.

RON

A cesspool's pretty deep too, but not everyone walks in one.

The bell rings, and the kids jump up to leave.

MANFRED

I didn't dismiss ...

But it's too late. They are already on their way to the door.

Tessa stops at Manfred's podium.

TESSA

I'll see you at tryouts.

She hums as she walks out of the room.

Manfred scratches his butt.

INT. MANFRED'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Kally and Manfred sit on the couch. He tries to put his arm around her, but she stands up.

KALLY  
I need a drink.

A lecherous grin spreads over Manfred's face.

MANFRED  
Hurry back.

KALLY  
You're never in a hurry about anything.

She gets a cup of crushed ice from the fridge and then pulls a whiskey bottle out of the cabinet.

She pours herself a good, stout drink.

MANFRED  
You don't usually drink.

KALLY  
You do enough for both of us ... and then some.

MANFRED  
(ignoring her)  
Could I have one of those?

KALLY  
You know where the ice is.

Manfred passes Kally as she's going into the living room.

He gets his ice, pours in whiskey, and heads back to the living room to see Kally sitting on the chair and not the sofa.

He sits on the sofa closest to Kally and tries to look into her eyes. She stares straight ahead.

He sighs, kind of collapses back into the sofa.

KALLY (CONT'D)  
Manny, what do you want to do?

MANFRED  
I've never done it in a chair, but I'll try anything once.

KALLY  
For once think with the brain  
between your ears.

MANFRED  
Okay.

He sets his drink down.

MANFRED (CONT'D)  
I've given this a lot of thought  
actually.

KALLY  
I doubt it.

MANFRED  
I want to get out of teaching as  
soon as I can.

KALLY  
Teaching is safe.

MANFRED  
The principal called me into his  
office today and told me I was  
going to do the play.

KALLY  
So?

MANFRED  
That means less time with you.

KALLY  
Absence makes the heart grow  
fonder.

Manfred says nothing, just kind of looks at Kally.

KALLY (CONT'D)  
What's the stipend?

MANFRED  
Not nearly enough.

KALLY  
Every little bit helps.

MANFRED  
I feel trapped.

Sound of GURGLING water from a fish tank.

One fish has its nose stuck right up to the glass.

KALLY

Don't be so dramatic.

MANFRED

I'm a writer.

KALLY

You've had two plays published --

Manfred's voice become a little more insistent. There's an almost hysterical edge to it.

MANFRED

Three. I've had three plays published.

KALLY

And what were your royalties last year?

MANFRED

Every little bit helps.

KALLY

How long has it been since you've written a play?

MANFRED

It doesn't matter. I'm working on a verse novel.

KALLY

It's always something different.

MANFRED

My poetry is good. I have this buddy in a band. He wants to see something I've written. Maybe to make a song out of it. Do you know how much royalties are in a hit song?

KALLY

Let me hear your song.

INT. AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

Metal band on stage. Lights down except for the ones flashing on the band.

Singer in black with tats all over his arms and neck.

Discordant CHORD REVERBERATES, fans SCREAM.

EXPLOSION spitting fire.

More SCREAMS.

SINGER

(screams)

I'm in love with you. It's a love  
that's true.

SHREDDING guitar, SCREAMS from audience and singer.

SINGER (CONT'D)

Love is like a summer breeze. It  
rattles in the autumn leaves. I  
want you more than I want life.  
Need for you to end my strife.

Everything on the stage freezes.

INT. MANFRED'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Kally stares at him.

KALLY

You're kidding.

MANFRED

What?

KALLY

You, true; breeze, leaves; life,  
strife? You've used every cliché in  
song writing. You even have summer  
breeze and autumn leaves in  
practically the same sentence. It  
doesn't make sense.

MANFRED

It needs work.

KALLY

Writing is a great hobby, but --

MANFRED

Hobby! Writing is my way to get out  
of this cesspool.

Anger flashes in his face, but it quickly subsides in the  
silence.

KALLY

Let me tell you a story.

Manfred sags with an almost explosive exhalation.

KALLY (CONT'D)

My roommate in college wrote the best poetry I've ever read.

This gets Manfred's attention, and he sits up.

KALLY (CONT'D)

She works as a bartender.

MANFRED

You've never told me about her.

KALLY

That's not the point.

MANFRED

I thought I knew everything about you.

KALLY

She and I get drinks every now and then. She would never consider teaching a trap.

MANFRED

I won't starve. I'm not gonna quit until my writing comes through.

Kally gets up from her chair and sits beside Manfred on the couch.

KALLY

I don't want you to get your hopes up.

MANFRED

Hope is a thing with--

She leans forward to kiss him, pushes him down on the couch kisses him again.

KALLY

Let me show you some reality.

EXT. BEACH - NIGHT

Stars sprinkle the sky. Water laps up on the beach.

Manfred lies on a blanket with *Bev*, both in swim suits.

A yacht is in a dock nearby. On a hill behind them are lights illuminating a beautiful mansion.

A falling star streaks across the sky.

MANFRED

We get a wish.

Silence for about two seconds.

BEV

What did you wish for?

MANFRED

If I tell, it won't come true.

BEV

I won't tell either, unless  
nonverbal communication counts.

MANFRED

Once a speech teacher --

She kisses him, lies on top of him.

He unhooks her bra, chuckles.

MANFRED (CONT'D)

It looks like you guessed what I  
wished for too.

He rolls over with her, fumbles with her bottoms.

BEV

But first we need to talk about my  
biological clock.

INT. MANFRED'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Manfred and Kally lie on the couch. Kally is down to her undergarments.

MANFRED

What?

KALLY

My biological clock. We're not  
getting any younger.

MANFRED

I'm 25.

KALLY  
I've been thinking about what I  
want.

MANFRED  
(under his breath)  
Oh, no.

KALLY  
What?

MANFRED  
What *do* you want?

KALLY  
I want to get married and have  
kids. I want to teach until I'm 55  
and then I want to retire and  
travel before I get old and  
wrinkly.

MANFRED  
Wrinkles aren't bad.

He reaches for her again, but she stops his hand.

KALLY  
I don't want to keep doing this if  
you're not willing --

He studies her up and down.

MANFRED  
Do you know how much I love your  
body?

KALLY  
But do you love me?

MANFRED  
You know you're my only girl.

She SQUEALS and grabs his face to kiss it.

Nearby the fish tank gurgles and fish happily chase one  
another except for the one with his nose pressed up against  
the glass.

It slowly turns over on its back and floats to the top of the  
water.

EXT. DRIVEWAY IN FRONT OF MANFRED'S HOUSE - DAY

Manfred pulls his car into the driveway. When he gets out, he goes straight to his mailbox, pulls out a business sized envelope.

He hurries as quickly as he can to his front door, unlocks it, and flips on a light.

INT. MANFRED'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Six empty beer cans sit on a coffee table. A long slip of paper is ripped in two.

Manfred snores on the couch.

INT. AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

Manfred sits on a stage shrouded in darkness.

Two spotlights shine on his face. His heart THUDS like a bass drum in his head.

Chains wrap his body.

A GODITER, in black robes and wearing a SCREAM mask, sits in a booth at the end of the auditorium and several feet off the ground.

In a theater, this is the place from which the lights and sounds originate.

He stares at Manfred.

MANFRED

Could I have something for my  
headache?

GODITER

No!

The voice booms like the wizard from Oz, the movie version.

MANFRED

Mr. Editor.

GODITER

To you, I am Mr. ... Goditer.  
You've never seen me, but I decide.

MANFRED

Decide what?

GODITER  
Your fate, stupid. And you call  
yourself a writer.

MANFRED  
Speaking of writing.

GODITER  
What kind of transition is that?

MANFRED  
Uh, what was wrong with the poems I  
sent to you.

GODITER  
Mr. Smith, thank you for you  
submission. While we appreciate  
the thought and care that you put  
into it, it doesn't fit our current  
needs. We wish you luck in placing  
it elsewhere.

MANFRED  
It's a form letter.

GODITER  
I should have been more personal.  
Dear Mr. Smith. Your poetry sucks.  
Please refrain from dirtying the  
literary waters with this flotsam  
you call writing.

The Goditor stands.

GODITER (CONT'D)  
Feed him to the pit.

The chains tighten and lift Manfred in the air.

Metal SCREECHES, chains JANGLE.

A hole opens in the stage and Manfred dangles over it.

In the hole is a swirling whirlpool of papers.

The chain lowers him closer and closer to the hole.

Manfred squirms and twists, the chains making horrible  
JANGLING noises.

INT. MANFRED'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Alarm clock SHRIEKING.

Manfred squirming on the couch, falling off and thudding to the floor.

He looks at his phone.

Runs out the door.

INT. TEACHER'S LOUNGE - DAY

Manfred gargles mouthwash.

LIZZY LUKENS, school counselor, comes into the dark room.

LIZZY  
Oh, there you are.

She sniffs.

LIZZY (CONT'D)  
I hope that mouthwash is alcohol free.

He looks up, dribbles trickling to his chin. Spits.

LIZZY (CONT'D)  
I think you've had too much alcohol already.

MANFRED  
That bad?

LIZZY  
I'd avoid the principal. Of course you can't avoid the kids...

She pauses.

LIZZY (CONT'D)  
So, you didn't change last night?

MANFRED  
How'd you know?

LIZZY  
Kally mentioned it to the entire office staff.

MANFRED  
Shit.

LIZZY  
Is there something wrong?

MANFRED

You wouldn't understand.

LIZZY

I'm a counselor.

Manfred pulls a coffee cup out of a cabinet, a small mug at first, but then he puts it back and pulls out a 16 ounce red Solo cup and fills it with coffee. When he picks it up ...

MANFRED

Shit!

And drops it in the sink, the coffee spilling all over the front of his shirt. He jumps around yelling shit several times. When he finally stops.

LIZZY

Maybe they won't smell the beer now. Come to my office during your prep period. I have some news you might be interested in.

She looks at him and laughs.

LIZZY (CONT'D)

We also have some shirts on hand in case of emergencies.

Eric comes in as Lizzy exits.

Manfred spies him.

MANFRED

You prick.

Eric holds up his hand.

ERIC

It wasn't my idea, so don't get pissed at me.

MANFRED

You didn't complain.

ERIC

I'm not stupid.

MANFRED

You're not a runner either.

Eric LAUGHS.

ERIC  
You in the mood for wings and beer  
after school?

MANFRED  
I need to --

ERIC  
Check with Kally.

MANFRED  
She's not my boss.

ERIC  
I think she's looking for you.

MANFRED  
Damn.

He flees.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Manfred strides down the hallway just as Tessa comes out of  
the girls' bathroom.

She flips her hair.

TESSA  
Hello, Mr. Smith.

She walks away. He scratches his butt.

Then he sees Kally turning the hallway corner. He ducks into  
the boys' bathroom.

Ron Hunt looks at himself in the mirror. He turns to see  
Manfred.

RON  
Aren't those the clothes you were  
wearing yesterday?

MANFRED  
No.

Ron sniffs.

RON  
I wouldn't go near Milburn if I  
were you.

MANFRED  
Go in the hallway and tell me if  
it's safe.

RON  
Sure thing.

He pops out, pops back in.

RON (CONT'D)  
It's safe.

Manfred steps out of the bathroom where Kally leans against  
some lockers.

He glares at Ron who smiles.

RON (CONT'D)  
You didn't say from what.

KALLY  
Were you hiding from me?

MANFRED  
Of course not.

KALLY  
(To Ron)  
Ron?

RON  
No, Ms. Jones. I know for a fact  
that Mr. Smith wants to spend every  
waking moment with you.

KALLY  
How sweet.

She hugs him and backs away.

KALLY (CONT'D)  
You better not let Milburn get a  
whiff of you. ... My kids are going  
to the LMC during your plan period.  
I'll be alone in my room.

He gently breaks free from her.

MANFRED  
I can't. I'm ... uh, I'm going to  
the counselor.

Kelly steps back.

KALLY  
Lizzy? You're not going to talk  
about me, are you?

MANFRED  
She thinks I might have a mental  
issue.

KALLY  
You should go see her.

He walks away.

KALLY (CONT'D)  
Talk to her about your drinking.

He ignores her and keeps walking.

KALLY (CONT'D)  
Will I see you after school?

MANFRED  
Later.

KALLY  
That's the wrong ...

He turns the corner.

KALLY (CONT'D)  
Way.

She waits for a second, but when he doesn't come back, she  
heads for her room.

INT. COUNSELOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Msnfred closes the door behind him, and Lizzy hands him a  
shirt.

LIZZY  
It'll make you feel better.

He holds the shirt, looks around.

LIZZY (CONT'D)  
Through that door is a bathroom.

Lizzy picks up the phone.

LIZZY (CONT'D)  
Julie, hold my calls. I have an  
appointment with Mr. Smith.

She pauses.

LIZZY (CONT'D)  
I'll be perfectly safe.

Toilet FLUSHES.

LIZZY (CONT'D)  
I have to go.

Manfred comes out of the toilet, looking a little unmatched with his Hill Street High School Heroes sweat shirt and a pair of black dress pants.

LIZZY (CONT'D)  
Did you take a dump in my bathroom?

She GROANS.

LIZZY (CONT'D)  
Oh my god, you did. I can smell it all the way over here. There is nothing worse than beer shit.

She takes a can of air freshener and sprays it all over the room.

LIZZY (CONT'D)  
Sit down.

He starts to sit right in front of her desk. On it is a bowl of round candies.

He helps himself.

LIZZY (CONT'D)  
Not too close.

She waves her hand in front of her nose. He grabs some more candy and scoots his chair back. His feet start tapping.

MANFRED  
What do you need, Ms. Lukens?

LIZZY  
Lizzy. You have a master's degree in English, don't you?

He reaches the few feet from his chair to her desk and gets more candy.

With his mouth full...

MANFRED

Yeah, but it ain't done me no good.

He chuckles, but Lizzy doesn't.

LIZZY

I can make life easier for you.

MANFRED

You know a hit man?

Lizzy glares at him.

LIZZY

Kally's your problem.

Manfred taps his feet a little faster.

LIZZY (CONT'D)

Maybe you're not right for this.  
Eric has a master's --

MANFRED

Screw, Eric!

He pauses.

MANFRED (CONT'D)

Uh, sorry, just feeling a little,  
uh ...

LIZZY

Angry?

Manfred's knees are bouncing a little now. Lizzy watches him.

LIZZY (CONT'D)

You've pretty much had the -- shall  
we say, less motivated students  
dumped into your lap the last three  
years.

MANFRED

Now they've dumped the play on me.

LIZZY

I can make your life easier at  
least for next year.

MANFRED

(suddenly serious, eyes  
narrowing)  
What are you suggesting?

LIZZY

Something you'll like, I'm sure, if what I've heard about you is true.

MANFRED

This is kind of sudden.

LIZZY

Northeast Community College wants someone to teach dual-credit class for them here.

MANFRED

Oh.

LIZZY

Oh? Just oh? You would have only the best Hill Street students

MANFRED

If they're like Tessa--

LIZZY

She graduates this year.

MANFRED

I'm listening.

Manfred reaches for more candy. His nervous movement has settled.

MANFRED (CONT'D)

I got my master's because I always wanted to teach at a university.

LIZZY

This is the next best thing. You would have the best of our students, and most, if not all of them, are more motivated than your typical college freshman. What do you say?

MANFRED

Kally might --

LIZZY

What's Kally got to do with it?

His face grows angry. He grabs more candy and stuffs it in his mouth.

MANFRED

Nothing. Absolutely nothing. She thinks I'm crazy anyway.

LIZZY

Oh?

MANFRED

When I told her, I was going to the counselor, she practically celebrated.

LIZZY

Do you feel crazy?

MANFRED

No. Maybe. I don't know. Sometimes?

LIZZY

Drinking a lot is a form of self medication.

MANFRED

I don't drink that much ... well, maybe I do.

He begins to slouch in his chair.

LIZZY

Have you ever wanted to kill yourself?

MANFRED

Geez, no.

LIZZY

Ever?

MANFRED

Not since high school. Maybe once in middle school. And then in college ...

Lizzy begins scratching notes.

LIZZY

Racing thoughts? Insomnia?

MANFRED

Sometimes. When I do sleep, I have some of the freakiest dreams.

LIZZY

Have you gotten tired of the things  
that you used to find pleasure in?

MANFRED

Maybe.

LIZZY

Mood swings? Feeling high one  
moment, talking fast, the life of  
the party; down in the dumps the  
next. Feeling like you want to  
cry?

Manfred just nods.

LIZZY (CONT'D)

How's your sex life?

MANFRED

I've never lost pleasure in --  
that's a pretty personal question  
there.

LIZZY

I'm a counselor.

He jumps up.

MANFRED

I'm not crazy.

LIZZY

I didn't say you were. Legally, I  
can't make diagnoses --

He starts to leave but then stops.

MANFRED

So, what would be your treatment  
for someone who's depressed or  
worse.

LIZZY

Besides psychotropic drugs?

MANFRED

Yeah, besides that.

LIZZY

Exercise. I like to walk in  
University Park at night.

MANFRED

That's when all the college couples are out.

LIZZY

It makes me feel young again.

MANFRED

You're not old.

LIZZY

Thanks. I know you'll want to talk to Kally about the position --

MANFRED

Kally just thinks she's my boss. Of course, I'll teach the classes.

He shuts the door behind him. Lizzy taps her pen on her desk.

LIZZY

Interesting.

INT. MANFRED'S CLASSROOM - DAY

Manfred sits on his desk.

MANFRED

About those plums in the refrigerator.

Tessa's hand shoots up. Manfred nonchalantly nods to her like, "Go ahead. I won't get you to shut up anyway."

TESSA

I think the plums represent something good we save up for ourselves -- like money for a rainy day -- but then someone comes along and takes it.

MANFRED

Very insightful.

Ron raises his hand.

Manfred gestures to him.

RON

I think the guy ate his wife's plums because they looked awesome.

Kids in class LAUGH.

TESSA  
You are so ignorant.

MANFRED  
Actually, Tessa, Ron is right  
Williams is an imagist poet. His  
poetry tries to capture everyday  
life. Nothing too deep.

TESSA  
I still think it's ignorant.

Bell RINGS.

The kids except for Tessa flee, and she comes to Manfred's  
desk and lays down three play books.

TESSA (CONT'D)  
*The Antigone and the Ecstasy. The  
Twelfth Night of the Tempest. If  
These Walls Could Talk.*

MANFRED  
My plays?

TESSA  
I had them shipped overnight. Would  
you autograph them?

MANFRED  
Sure.

He gets a pen.

TESSA  
Sign it. To Tessa. Hill Street's  
Starlet.

He scrawls on it and gives it to her. She reads it.

TESSA (CONT'D)  
It looks like Harlot.

MANFRED  
Sorry, in a hurry.

He scrawls on the other two.

TESSA  
When are we going to have a drama  
meeting?

MANFRED

I think ... I think that's a great idea. After school.

TESSA

You want to know my favorite?

MANFRED

What?

TESSA

Play. I like Antigone. It's got a great female lead. The language of Tempest is too difficult and the other reminds me of that boring play we read last year.

MANFRED

*Our Town.*

TESSA

That was it.

She starts to leave but then pauses and smiles at him.

TESSA (CONT'D)

Mr. Smith, I won't say anything, but you smell like a brewery.

Manfred stares at her for a moment and watches her go, and then he walks from his room into the

INT. HALLWAY

Where Kally meets him.

KALLY

You coming over?

MANFRED

Can't. Got a drama meeting.

KALLY

How'd your visit with--

MANFRED

Later, Kally.

INT. AUDITORIUM - DAY

About a dozen kids are scattered on the stage.

Manfred walks down front and sees Tessa sitting on center stage, her legs dangling over the edge.

She smiles at him.

MANFRED

Welcome to our first meeting for  
the fall play.

He sees Ron.

MANFRED (CONT'D)

Ron? Is that you?

RON

No, I'm a hallucination.

MANFRED

Don't be a smart ass.

Several of the kids look up in surprise, but Ron and HALEY HILL a freshman laugh. Tessa is shocked.

MANFRED (CONT'D)

Not all of you are going to get big parts. You can be a part of the team by playing a smaller part or working on the crew if I ask you to or you can get out now.

He pauses to look around.

MANFRED (CONT'D)

I see no ones' leaving. I'd like to think that all of you are willing to do any small thing to make this play a success.

(He sits down in an  
auditorium seat.)

I'd like to think that, but I'm guessing you all think you're going to get a big part.

Haley sits on the stage a few kids down from Tessa.

HALEY

That's a little cynical, isn't it?

MANFRED

What?

HALEY

That comment.

Manfred frowns in confusion, sits up in his chair from his slouched position.

MANFRED  
Did I say that aloud?

Several of the kids look at him as if he's crazy.

MANFRED (CONT'D)  
Let's get started.

He sits there. As silence engulfs the auditorium, the kids look in confusion at each other.

TESSA  
(quietly)  
You're the director.

MANFRED  
No one wants to be a leader, huh?

HALEY  
We don't even know what the play is.

MANFRED  
Right, right. I guess I was in another world there. What did you say your name was?

HALEY  
Haley Hill.

MANFRED  
I don't recall seeing you around.

HALEY  
I'm a freshman.

Tessa barely suppresses a laugh.

MANFRED  
I guess I could tell you the play I have selected.

TESSA  
Is it *Antigone and the Ecstasy*?

MANFRED  
(annoyed)  
No.

TESSA

*The 12th Night of the Tempest?* It has some good female roles.

MANFRED

(even more annoyed)

We're not going to do that one either. We're going to do

(dramatic pause)

*If These Walls Could Talk about our School.* It's a lot like the play *Our Town*.

RON

That was boring.

TESSA

Mr. Smith wrote this one.

HALEY

(To Ron)

You just lost your part.

MANFRED

*Our Town* is about ... a town. My play is about ... a school. It has a narrator in it. Can you guess his name?

No one answers.

MANFRED (CONT'D)

Woody Walls -- and he's the actual walls of the school. If these *Walls* could talk.

TESSA

Why does the narrator have to be male?

HALEY

It's a play on the name. Wooden Walls. Woody.

(To Manfred)

You'll never get enough guys to fill the parts.

RON

He's got me.

MANFRED

I guess I do.

Manfred stands.

MANFRED (CONT'D)  
That's all for today.

He walks out of the auditorium.

TESSA  
Is he for real?

HALEY  
He smells like a brewery.

RON  
I like him.

HALEY  
So do I.

Tessa laughs and struts off the stage. Ron and Haley look at each other and in unison make GAGGING noises. Then they laugh.

INT. BAR/RESTAURANT - DAY

Bev and Eric sit in a large, round booth near the bar and drink beer.

A soccer game plays on the big screen behind the bar. The place has screens everywhere.

Bev munches peanuts from a can on the table.

BEV  
I'll be surprised if he comes.

ERIC  
That would tell us something.

BEV  
Do you know what would be even worse?

ERIC  
If he brought her.

Bev CHUCKLES.

ERIC (CONT'D)  
You ought to go after Manfred.

BEV  
No chance.

ERIC  
He's good looking. And definitely  
faithful.

Eric looks at the big screen. Bev watches him and SIGHS, but he doesn't hear.

BEV  
I really have my eye on someone  
else.

Eric turns back to her.

ERIC  
Who's the lucky guy?

When she starts to speak, he interrupts.

ERIC (CONT'D)  
There he is. Alone.

Manfred glances at the two of them and then proceeds cautiously.

MANFRED  
Bev, I didn't expect to see you  
here.

ERIC  
I hope Kally doesn't get mad.

MANFRED  
She doesn't even ...

He stops himself and sits beside Bev. She scoots away from him a little bit, but he doesn't even notice.

Eric grins at her.

BEV  
You didn't tell Kally you were  
coming?

MANFRED  
I don't have to get approval --

ERIC  
Where does she think you are?

Manfred shifts nervously in his seat.

MANFRED  
A drama meeting.

BEV  
You lied to her?

MANFRED  
No.

Bev and Eric wait for more.

MANFRED (CONT'D)  
It was a short meeting.

ERIC  
I did you a favor by dumping that  
play on you. You get time away from  
Kally.

The waiter comes to their table.

ERIC (CONT'D)  
Beer all around --

MANFRED  
I want a Jack and coke.

ERIC  
I'll take the mini pizza -- cheese  
and sausage.  
(To Manfred)  
Do you want your boneless --

MANFRED  
(insulted)  
I can order for myself.

He glances over the menu, furrows his brow.

MANFRED (CONT'D)  
I don't know--

ERIC  
You've never gotten anything but  
the barbecue boneless wings here.

BEV  
I'll take a cheeseburger. Plain, no  
fries.

ERIC  
Come on, Bev. Live a little.

The waiter looks at Manfred who still studies his menu.

WAITER  
Perhaps I can come back.

MANFRED  
I'll take the chicken tenders.

The waiter starts to walk away.

MANFRED (CONT'D)  
With barbecue sauce on the side.

BEV  
What did you do at play practice?

MANFRED  
Told them which play we're doing.

BEV  
What are you doing?

MANFRED  
*If These Walls Could Talk about Our School.*

BEV  
Isn't that one you published?

ERIC  
Why didn't I know you published a play?

The waiter sets their drinks down. Manfred empties half of his in one chug and then coughs.

MANFRED  
You never asked.

ERIC  
Isn't it a bit self-centered to direct a play you wrote?

MANFRED  
Not when I get the royalties that come with it.

Manfred downs most of the rest of his drink.

ERIC  
Royalties and a stipend?

MANFRED  
(angrily)  
You want the damn play back?

Manfred catches the attention of the waiter who goes to their table.

MANFRED (CONT'D)

Give me another one. A little more  
jack and a little less coke.

Bev and Eric exchange glances. A scheme passes between them.

BEV

We ought to call Kally and ask her  
to join us.

Manfred stops in mid drink.

ERIC

She's probably waiting for you to  
call her anyway.

MANFRED

No.

ERIC

I'm surprised she hasn't called  
you.

MANFRED

My phone's off.

BEV

You guys fight?

MANFRED

No, it's just that --

Waiter gives him a drink; he takes a swig, makes face.

MANFRED (CONT'D)

Better. I don't always have to be  
with her.

BEV

Then, why are you?

Manfred leans back in his chair, defensive, arms crossed in  
front of him.

ERIC

You can't even get away from her at  
school. You never go anywhere  
without her.

MANFRED

Two people who are committed to  
each other --

ERIC

This isn't about commitment; it's about control.

BEV

She's strangling you.

Manfred drinks most of his drink and sets his glass down. His arms are no longer crossed and he's leaning forward listening.

BEV (CONT'D)

I've seen toxic relationships before -- albeit most of them are high school kids. People gets so wrapped up in someone they lose themselves.

ERIC

No one knows you by Manfred anymore. It's Kally's boyfriend or lover or fiance -- whatever rumor they've heard.

EXT. OUTSIDE BAR/RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Bev and Eric step into the night air.

Manfred staggers after them. He stumbles, but Eric catches him. Manfred fumbles in his pockets and pulls his keys out; they fall to the ground.

Out of nowhere, he looks up and straight at Bev.

MANFRED

She is a bitch.

He stumbles a little more, and Bev keeps him from falling.

Eric gets Manfred's keys off the ground.

BEV

He's not going to drive home. I'll take him in his car and you can follow me.

MANFRED

I can drive myself.

He drops to his knees on the parking lot and pukes.

Bev helps him up.

MANFRED (CONT'D)

Maybe not.

BEV

After I get him in his apartment,  
you can bring me back here.

Eric pauses.

BEV (CONT'D)

Help me get him into his car.

The two of them wrangle him into the back seat where he  
sprawls out.

Bev pulls away in the car.

Eric stands on the lot.

ERIC

I think she does like him.

As Bev drives away, she looks back in her mirror at Eric and  
SIGHS.

EXT./INT. MANFRED'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Bev pulls into Manfred's driveway, sees a car there.  
Manfred's head appears above the back seat.

The lights in the house are off except for one lamp in the  
living room.

MANFRED

Uh, oh, the bitch is back.

BEV

Don't call her a bitch.

MANFRED

You did.

BEV

Can you get in by yourself?

MANFRED

Uh, huh.

He nods his head, gets out of the car, staggers, falls on his  
knees to the ground.

MANFRED (CONT'D)

Unh uh.

Shakes his head, tries to get back up, makes it to his knees, fall back down, face plants into the lawn, gets back up on his knees.

Bev gets out of the car and goes to him.

The porch light comes on, and out barrels Kally.

KALLY

What did you do to him?

MANFRED

There's the --

Bev covers his mouth. MUFFLED word.

MANFRED (CONT'D)

Now. I'm home, darlin.

He staggers to his feet and stands, with a little sway thrown in.

KALLY

I never thought my best friend --

BEV

He got drunk. I brought him home so he wouldn't kill himself in his car.

Kally grabs Manfred's arms and tries to steady him.

KALLY

That's convenient --

ERIC (O.S.)

I see you have him standing up at least. What's up, Kally?

KALLY

Eric?

ERIC

He got a little drunk.

Manfred looks at Bev and then at Kally.

MANFRED

I think Bev loves --

ERIC

He drank a few Jack and Cokes.

MANFRED

Or is that jacks and cokes?

He tries to break free of Kally and stumbles into Bev. Eric pushes him back and he almost topples into Kally.

KALLY

He shouldn't drink. He knows what I

--

BEV

Maybe he's celebrating his first play practice.

KALLY

Why didn't he invite me?

MANFRED

The play sucks.

BEV

No, it doesn't.

ERIC

He showed up to brag. He told me how he would get his stipend and royalties for using his own play. I bought him a drink for his ingenuity.

BEV

Then I did. One drink led to another.

MANFRED

Bev is so sweet.

He reaches for her, but she steps back. Eric comes forward and puts his arm around her.

Manfred slowly shakes his head.

ERIC

It was sweet for her to take you home.

Bev gives Kally Manfred's car keys as Kally glares.

Bev and Eric turn away.

KALLY

(to Manfred)

I need to get you to bed.

MANFRED

I need to go to bed.

KALLY

You need to sleep this off.

MANFRED

I need to sleep this off.

Kally gets the door open and starts to help him inside, but he puts his hand on her chest and stops her.

MANFRED (CONT'D)

I can do it myself.

MEANWHILE:

Bev and Rick walk toward his car which is parked just up the street alongside the road.

BEV

Do you think she's thinking --

A car STARTS up.

ERIC

I saved you.

BEV

Thanks for that. If she does think what I think she thinks...

Not even glancing at them, Kally passes them in her car.

ERIC

What the hell?

BEV

Do you think he kicked her out?

They look at each other.

BEV (CONT'D)

Nah.

ERIC

Nah.

BEV

Maybe we gave him something to think about though.

ERIC

It'll be forgotten by tomorrow.

BEV  
You think?

ERIC  
Yeah.

BEV  
Yeah. Do you ...

ERIC  
What?

BEV  
Nothing. Thanks for taking me back  
to my car.

INT. WOODEN BOX THE SIZE OF A CASKET - NIGHT

Manfred lies in a wooden box with air holes poked in the top of it. (The box sits right on the edge of a stage.)

He breathes heavily, pushes against the box, screams but no sound comes out, struggles.

Box CREAKS and then shrinks by an inch or two on each side.

He screams soundlessly again.

Something hard hits the box, CRACKING loudly, the sound causing him to shriek wordlessly again.

Another loud BANG.

He leans to one side of the box and rocks it as much as he can.

Another BOOM rocks the box and it shrinks again, squeezing against his body tightly.

He flops as hard as he can and the box rolls over.

(It falls off the stage and cracks open.)

Manfred SCREAMS.

INT. MANFRED'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Manfred awakens on the floor, an afghan wound around his body like a burial cloth.

Loud KNOCKING on the door, then a key in the lock, then Kally coming in.

KALLY  
I heard screaming.

MANFRED  
(mumbles)  
A nightmare.

KALLY  
Serves you right.

MANFRED  
What happened to me?

Kally is concerned. She sits by him on the couch and places her hand on his shoulder. She squeezes it in an attempt to reassure him

KALLY  
You don't remember?

MANFRED  
I remember ... play practice, I think.

KALLY  
You had a blackout.

MANFRED  
Excuse me.

Manfred climbs to his feet and wobbles back and forth between the walls and staggers into the bathroom, pukes and pukes, flushes the toilet, staggers back out.

Kally slides her arms under his and braces him as she leads him back to the couch.

KALLY  
I guess you don't feel like jogging.

MANFRED  
Not really.

KALLY  
I need to. Do you want me to fix you something before I go?

MANFRED  
Feeling a little queasy.

KALLY  
You should stay in, take it easy -- maybe do some writing.

MANFRED

(breezy)

I have been thinking about an idea  
for a new play. A romantic comedy.

Kally pats his knee.

KALLY

I'm sure it will be great.

Kally walks toward the door.

MANFRED

Do you want to know what it's  
about?

KALLY

Later.

She opens the door.

MANFRED

See you later?

KALLY

Maybe.

MANFRED

I think it was the ... uh ...  
wings. Food poisoning.

He stands as swiftly as he can and staggers down the hall  
again.

Kally opens the door, stands there, starts to go back, but  
instead wipes her eyes and leaves.

Manfred PUKES from the bathroom.

INT. MANFRED'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A beer sits in front of Manfred and a bottle of Tylenol.

On the coffee table sits a blank piece of paper; a row of ink  
pens arranged neatly by color sits next to the paper.

He picks up his phone and checks it.

He puts his phone down, picks up a pen, puts pen to paper ...  
writes nothing.

He throws his pen and bounces it off the wall.

Then, he scatters everything off his table like a toddler having a temper tantrum.

He picks up the phone again and checks it, texts, stands, paces a little.

Then, he leaves.

EXT. UNIVERSITY PARK - NIGHT

University Park has a huge pond in the middle of it with a walking path lit intermittently with softly glowing lamp posts. The posts light the path but they don't block out the stars.

Near each lamp post is a wooden bench. Manfred sits on one and stares at the water where some ducks linger. He tosses some bread out to them, and they flock to the pieces floating on the water.

Lizzy walks down the path and comes upon Manfred.

A couple of young adults, one of them Manfred's former student TIM, walk up behind her.

Lizzy turns and sees them but puts her finger to her lips to signal them to keep silent.

The boy and girl walk on past, grin as they go, but he stops at Manfred's bench.

TIM  
Mr. Smith?

MANFRED  
Do I know you?

TIM  
Tim. I had you for English my senior year. How are you?

MANFRED  
Oh, yeah. Tim. Doing fine, Tim.

TIM  
I bet.

They walk away. Then ...

LIZZY  
They always expect you to remember them.

She sits by his side on the bench. He gives her a couple pieces of bread.

Silently, she tears the bread into pieces and tosses them one by one into the pond.

More ducks have arrived, and they tussle for the tossed bread.

MANFRED  
They're so demanding.

LIZZY  
Have you noticed how the drakes go after the hens? Whew!

Manfred tosses another handful of bread into the water.

LIZZY (CONT'D)  
People could learn a lot from the animal kingdom ... I've never seen you here.

MANFRED  
This is where I gave Kally her promise ring.

LIZZY  
Oh.

MANFRED  
I needed to get out of the house.

Lizzy tosses her last bit of bread into the water, knocks the crumbs off her hands.

LIZZY  
I'll let you alone then.

She stands.

MANFRED  
No. I mean, I was sort of hoping I'd catch you out here.

LIZZY  
You remembered this was one of my favorite spots?

MANFRED  
Of course. I was just kind of hoping for someone to talk to.

LIZZY

I don't know if you realize this or not, but I'm a guidance counselor and a licensed professional counselor. I see a few patients at home -- enough to supplement my income. I could pencil you in for an appointment tomorrow.

MANFRED

Tomorrow's Sunday.

LIZZY

Uh, a good day for clients -- what with school -- and people's work schedules. How about six or so?

MANFRED

I think I need to talk about women.

LIZZY

You can't tell me anything I haven't already heard.

She stands to leave.

MANFRED

It's a beautiful night. Why don't you stay for a while? I'm not really in the mood to be alone.

LIZZY

What's wrong?

MANFRED

I feel ... a little desperate.

She settles on the bench, subtly leans against Manfred who appears to be oblivious.

Both of them suddenly sit up.

TOGETHER

Did you see that?

They laugh.

TOGETHER (CONT'D)

A falling star.

TOGETHER (CONT'D)

Make a wish

They giggle again ... Like kids.

LIZZY  
You have to make a wish.

MANFRED  
So do you.

A brief pause.

MANFRED (CONT'D)  
What did you wish for?

LIZZY  
If I tell you, it won't come true.

MANFRED  
With my luck, it won't come true  
anyway.

Lizzy puts her hand over his.

INT. MANFRED'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Manfred looks over a copy of *If These Walls Could Talk about our School*, slams it front down, leans forward, and grabs a beer.

MANFRED  
How can I let that girl get to me  
like that?

He turns it back over, looks at the cover.

MANFRED (CONT'D)  
This really does suck. What was I  
thinking? *Twelfth Night of the  
Tempest* -- now that's a good one.  
Miranda finds true love.

Settles back into the couch, beer in hand.

MANFRED (CONT'D)  
*Antigone and the Ecstasy*. Classic  
story. Beautiful, talented girl  
says goodbye to old boyfriend who  
is keeping her from her dreams of  
doing caricatures on the beach.

The doorbell RINGS.

He makes his way to his feet, sways just a little, goes to the door -- beer can in hand - throws the door open with his other hand.

MANFRED (CONT'D)  
My Miranda.

And sees Kally.

KALLY  
You're drunk again.

MANFRED  
No, I'm not.

She glares at his beer can.

MANFRED (CONT'D)  
This is my first one. I swear.

KALLY  
No matter.

MANFRED  
Come in.

KALLY  
For a minute.

She steps into the living room.

MANFRED  
Can I get you something to drink?  
To eat? Some coffee? I think I  
might have some donuts ...  
somewhere.

KALLY  
I've come for my things.

MANFRED  
Huh?

KALLY  
I'm keeping the promise ring. I  
want *something* out of this  
relationship.

She disappears into the bedroom.

Manfred sinks into the sofa, stunned.

He downs his beer, goes to the refrigerator for another, goes  
back to couch.

Phone RINGS as Kally comes back into hallway.

MANFRED

Lizzy?

Kally stares.

MANFRED (CONT'D)

I'm a little nervous. It's been a while.

Kally moves closer so that she can hear better.

MANFRED (CONT'D)

I'm still planning on being there, I promise. I'll go deep into --

He sees Kally.

MANFRED (CONT'D)

We can talk about it later. Dinner? No, not necessary. Wine? Sure. Six o'clock tonight, right?

He disconnects.

KALLY

It didn't take you long.

MANFRED

It's not what you think.

KALLY

I've heard that one too many times before.

MANFRED

She's my counselor.

KALLY

On Sunday? With wine? Please.

MANFRED

You wanted me to see a counselor.

KALLY

Seeing a counselor and sleeping with one are two different things.

MANFRED

I'm not sleeping --

KALLY

Just shut up. I'm tired of your lies. How could you? Sneaking behind my back --

MANFRED  
Sneaking behind your back?

KALLY  
Tim saw you last night with her. On  
our bench.

MANFRED  
How could Tim know which bench --

KALLY  
I'm finished. Go ahead and be with  
your conniving little bitch.

She flies out the door and slams it behind her.

MANFRED  
Lizzy? Now that's funny.

He sits down and takes a drink of his beer.

MANFRED (CONT'D)  
At least now I won't have to tell  
Kally about Bev.

INT. LIZ'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Manfred stands at the doorway of Liz's living room while  
Lizzy lounges on the couch, a bottle of wine and two glasses  
on the coffee table in front of her.

LIZZY  
Please, Manny, make yourself  
comfortable.

MANFRED  
Manny?

LIZZY  
I thought it might be less --

MANFRED  
My mom called me Manny.

LIZZY  
I thought by calling you a  
different name we could forget  
about our friendship and just be  
counselor/patient.

MANFRED  
Manny's fine.

He sits down on a chair even as Lizzy makes room for him on the couch.

LIZZY

I have a wonderful wine here. I find that for some of my clients, a little wine loosens them up.

She pours him more than a little bit of wine.

LIZZY (CONT'D)

The couch is more comfortable.

Manfred LAUGHS

LIZZY (CONT'D)

What's so funny?

MANFRED

Where's your legal pad?

LIZZY

Oh.

MANFRED

This chair is comfortable enough.

Lizzy takes him the wine.

He takes a big drink.

MANFRED (CONT'D)

I might need a lot more if I'm going to talk.

LIZZY

Right. Talk.

She smiles and goes back to the couch.

LIZZY (CONT'D)

You were concerned about women.

MANFRED

Some of the worst times of my life revolved around women.

LIZZY

Maybe you just haven't found the right one.

MANFRED

Women caused my suicide attempts.

EXT. WALLY'S BACK YARD - DAY

Two boys about 12 play whiffle ball. One is a young Manfred. The other his cousin WALLY.

MANFRED (V.O.)

My cousin Wally and I were playing in his backyard, something we always did when we weren't at the river, but the river's later.

WALLY

Ground rule double.

MANFRED

That cleared the fence. Home run.

WALLY

It bounced first.

A girl: ROXANNE also about 12, sits on the top of a short rock wall behind the batter.

ROXANNE

You're such a liar, Wally. It cleared the fence, home run, no doubt.

Manfred looks at her, his mouth agape.

MANFRED

My name is Man ...

ROXANNE

Man?

MANFRED

Manny.

ROXANNE

Watch it, Manny. Wally will screw you over.

She starts to climb back over the short fence into her own yard, but she turns back one last time.

ROXANNE (CONT'D)

Wally never told me how cute you were.

She climbs over her fence.

Manfred flops on the ground.

Wally throws his glove down in disgust and walks toward Manfred.

WALLY

Do you even care that you just won the game?

MANFRED

She said I was cute.

WALLY

I heard.

MANFRED

Do you think she likes me?

Wally drops on the ground next to Manfred.

WALLY

How should I know?

Manfred suddenly sits up.

MANFRED

I'm sorry. Do you like her?

WALLY

Are you serious?

MANFRED

I wonder if she'd be my girlfriend.

WALLY

Ask her.

MANFRED

I can't talk to girls.

WALLY

Write her a letter.

MANFRED

Great idea.

INT. YOUNG MANFRED'S KITCHEN - DAY

MANFRED (V.O.)

It wasn't a great idea.

Manfred sits at the kitchen table and scratches on a piece of paper. He crumples it up.

MANFRED (V.O.)  
Even then I wasn't much of a  
writer.

Manfred crumples up another piece of paper and tosses it at  
the trash can. Misses.

MANFRED (V.O.)  
Nor an athlete. I was pretty  
stupid though.

Two boys LUKE, TIM, both about 17. Luke is Manfred's brother.  
Tim, their cousin.

LUKE  
What are you trying to do, Bro?

TIM  
Besides make a mess.

MANFRED  
It's none of your business, Luke.

TIM  
Sounds serious.

MANFRED  
Yours either, Tim.

Luke picks up one of the papers and Manfred grabs for it.  
Too late. Luke dances away from him and tosses it to Tim who  
opens it.

TIM  
Problems with women.

MANFRED  
It's not funny.

Luke winks at Tim.

LUKE  
Of course, it's not funny, brother.  
We don't laugh at a man who's  
trying to communicate with his  
girl.

Tim reads a little bit of the letter, shakes his head.

MANFRED  
I just can't get the words right.

Luke sits on one side of Manfred and Tim on the other.

LUKE

It looks like we got here just in time.

TIM

We'll help you write it.

LUKE

You need to let her know right from the start that you're serious.

Tim starts to write.

TIM

Dear, Rocky. You are the love of my life, the foundation of all that is beautiful.

MANFRED

Her name is Roxanne.

LUKE

Rocky can be your pet name for her. Rocky -- foundation.

TIM

You have to admit it's a great metaphor.

EXT. WALLY'S BACK YARD - DAY

Roxanne sits on the stone fence.

Manfred pulls a piece of paper from his pocket, while Wally looks at several baseball cards spread out before him on the ground.

Wally is bored. Manfred, so scared, his hand trembles as he holds the paper.

MANFRED (V.O.)

The day came when I read the letter to her.

Manfred takes a deep breath.

MANFRED

(To Roxanne)

I wrote a letter to you.

ROXANNE

Why?

MANFRED

I'm a little shy. I wanted to make sure my words were perfect.

ROXANNE

That's kind of sweet.

Manfred smiles and stares at her.

ROXANNE (CONT'D)

Go ahead and read it.

MANFRED

Rocky, you are the love of my life, the foundation of all that is beautiful

ROXANNE

My name's Roxanne.

MANFRED

Rocky -- foundation. It's a metaphor.

ROXANNE

Go ahead.

MANFRED

It gets better. I promise. I just had to tell you how I feel about you. Well, I feel about you with my fingers because love is blind and Cupid has loosed his mighty arrows so that you alone are all I see.

Manfred pauses and glances briefly at Roxanne who has no emotion on her face.

MANFRED (CONT'D)

We go together like peanut butter and jelly, like milk and cookies, like ketchup with ham and beans. Loving you is a gas. Our romance will be explosive.

Wally snorts with laughter.

Manfred looks up at Roxanne, his expression desperate.

ROXANNE

Go on.

MANFRED

You are the pickle of my relish.  
You are like the gravy of my mashed  
potatoes. You are the bologna of my  
sandwich.

Wally begins to howl. He's lying on his side in the grass  
laughing.

MANFRED (CONT'D)

Never mind.

ROXANNE

I want to hear the rest of it.

MANFRED

You are the glove that fits on my  
hand when I play catch. No errors  
in our relationship. You are the  
icing on my cake, the chocolate  
chips in my ice cream. My love for  
you is devouring me, taking little  
nibbles, bit after bit from my  
heart. Please be mine.

Dramatic pause.

MANFRED (CONT'D)

Write back soon. Sincerely, Manny.

Roxanne gives him a look like she's going to melt into  
puddles, the kind of look people give cute puppies and  
kittens.

Then she suddenly smiles.

ROXANNE

Are you serious?

She laughs and climbs back over the fence into her own yard.

Manfred turns to look at Wally who still lies on the ground  
laughing.

MANFRED

So how'd you think it went?

INT. LIZZY'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Lizzy takes a big drink of her wine.

She tries to keep from laughing, chokes on her wine a little,  
regains herself.

LIZZY

How do you remember that?

MANFRED

I paraphrased. Poetic license.

LIZZY

How did this lead to a suicide attempt?

MANFRED

This is where the river comes in.

EXT. RIVER - DAY

Manfred and Wally sit on the sand and drink sodas.

MANFRED

What did Roxanne say when you asked her about me?

WALLY

She laughed.

MANFRED

Is that all?

WALLY

What did you expect? Pickle of my relish?

He LAUGHS aloud.

Manfred downs his soda.

MANFRED

I don't want to live without her.

He sets the soda can in the sand, stands.

MANFRED (CONT'D)

I'm going to do it.

Manfred starts up a narrow path that runs alongside the river. Wally follows.

WALLY

I need to whiz too.

Wally notices that they are pretty far above the water, at least ten feet or so. The current is particularly swift at this part. Manfred stops.

MANFRED

I'm going to jump off the cliff.

WALLY

You'll kill yourself.

MANFRED

If I die, my body will go down the current and come out by our moms. Make sure they grab me before the fish eat me.

WALLY

Don't be stupid.

Manfred takes two steps and jumps off the cliff.

WALLY (CONT'D)

Oh, shit.

He looks at the water and sees Manfred's head bob free.

WALLY (CONT'D)

Oh, shit.

Wally runs as fast as he can until he gets back to his and Manfred's mom.

WALLY (CONT'D)

Manfred ... he ...

He tries to catch his breath, considers what he is going to say.

WALLY (CONT'D)

Fell off the cliff upriver. The current is sweeping him this way. He's going to drown.

Their two mothers wade up the water as fast as they can, but then both stop suddenly.

Manfred swims calmly in their direction. His mom rushes to him and hugs him tightly.

INT. LIZ'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

The wine glass is full again. The wine bottle half empty.

LIZZY

It sounds like it wasn't your time.

MANFRED

When I survived the fall, I couldn't do it. Afterwards, people thought I was some kind of whiz kid, swimming free from a terrible current. Wally never really knew what to think.

Manfred stands and puts his wine glass on the table.

MANFRED (CONT'D)

I should go.

LIZZY

Wait. There were two other times you thought about killing yourself - - because of girls if I remember. I think you need to talk about them.

Manfred sits down on the couch and smiles humorlessly.

MANFRED

In high school, I liked a girl and we had even made plans to go to the prom together. She gave me a dear John letter on April 1st. I knew I was in trouble when the first line said, "This is not an April Fool's day joke."

Manfred frowns and in his face, and in the tone of his voice, you can hear the depression begin to take hold of him.

LIZZY

What happened?

MANFRED

I got drunk and tried to climb a tower on Party Drive. I wanted to jump off it, but Vertigo hit me so hard I threw up and had to climb back down.

LIZZY

Maybe you didn't really want to --

MANFRED

I did. In college there was another girl. I thought she was the one, but it didn't work out. There was a bridge that some college students ... Suicide heights. I decided I might as well ...

(MORE)

MANFRED (CONT'D)

My buddies took me out drinking -- one last fling, I thought. I drank so much I blacked out.

LIZZY

How much do you drink in a week, Manny?

MANFRED

It's what you do when you don't want to live but you're too afraid to die.

LIZZY

I think you might have depression or bipolar disorder or something. Let me refer you to psychiatrist.

MANFRED

Maybe some other time. Right now I'm too busy.

He heads for the door.

LIZZY

Manny.

He stops, his hand on the doorknob.

LIZZY (CONT'D)

The right woman for you is ... closer than you think. Go after her. You might be pleasantly surprised.

He smiles and opens the door.

INT. TEACHER'S LOUNGE - DAY

Bev, Eric, and Manfred sit at the table eating their lunches. Lizzy enters the room.

LIZZY

Do you mind if I join you?

She sits and opens a Tupperware lunch box with a sandwich, an apple, and some carrot sticks packed neatly inside.

BEV

We don't see much of you here.

LIZZY

The office was crazy. I had to get away. Want some carrots, Man ... Manfred?

She offers them, but he shakes his head.

LIZZY (CONT'D)

You should probably eat better.

Manfred takes a bite of greasy pizza. He also has some chips, a soda, and about six cookies.

MANFRED

I'm not in the mood, Lizzy.

LIZZY

I actually prefer Liz.

Eric glances at Bev. She smiles, a quick smile and then her face gets serious again.

BEV

Maybe you can weigh in on this dilemma ...

Lizzy sits and watches Manfred eat.

BEV (CONT'D)

Liz.

Lizzy quickly looks away from Manfred.

BEV (CONT'D)

I said, maybe you could give Manfred some advice.

LIZZY

Sure. About what?

Another stolen glance between Bev and Eric.

BEV

Manny ... Manfred had play tryouts last night. There's a senior. Tessa.

LIZZY

Her again?

BEV

You know her?

LIZZY

Unfortunately. I guess I'm not supposed to say that.

BEV

Tessa has had the lead in both the fall and spring plays every year she's tried out. This year, there's a freshman, Haley Hill, who deserves the lead. Manfred is afraid to give it to her.

LIZZY

If she earned it, she should get it.

BEV

But Tessa's mom is the president of the school board, and she's a bitch.

ERIC

I say he needs to save himself some trouble and give Tessa the part. We all know she'll do great. She does everything great.

LIZZY

If their auditions were close ...

MANFRED

They weren't.

LIZZY

You should do what your heart tells you. You can never go wrong that way.

She takes a dainty bite from her apple.

MANFRED

There's another good part for Tessa.

ERIC

If it's not the lead, it isn't good enough for her.

MANFRED

I'm tired of letting other people run my life.

LIZZY

They can only do it if you let them.

MANFRED

I'm not giving Tessa the part.

ERIC

Good luck.

LIZZY

I support you 100%.

BEV

It's nice to see someone around here who has some balls.

MANFRED

Thank you.

He smiles and stands, grabbing one of Liz's carrots as he does.

MANFRED (CONT'D)

I'm not going to post the list until I'm ready to leave.

He walks into the hallway and nearly runs into Tessa.

TESSA

I can't wait until after school. Tell me, Mr. Smith. I know it, but tell me anyway.

MANFRED

I'm not sure what you want me to tell you.

Tessa pats his shoulder.

TESSA

You're just teasing me. I know I got the lead. I can't wait to tell my friends.

She starts off down the hall.

MANFRED

Tessa.

She stops, her smile wide.

MANFRED (CONT'D)

You didn't get the lead.

TESSA  
Are you serious?

MANFRED  
I'm afraid so.

She whirls around and stomps down the hall. She turns the corner out of his sight.

Brett SIGHS and walks to his room.

He's about to step into it when he hears the intercom.

SHERRY  
Mr. Smith, please report to the office.

Manfred walks slowly to his desk and sets his lunch box down.

Just as slowly he walks out the door. When he walks up the hallway, he sees Tessa turn the corner.

MANFRED  
You realize you won't get any part now.

TESSA  
We'll just see what happens.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

Mr. Milburn sits quietly and stares at Manfred who maintains eye contact right back.

DAVID  
It's a serious accusation.

MANFRED  
Tessa's lying because she's mad about not getting the lead.

DAVID  
You do know that her mom is president of the school board?

MANFRED  
I'll tell her the same thing.

DAVID  
Sit in the outer office. I'll have someone cover your class.

David opens the door, and Manfred heads toward one of the chairs.

DAVID (CONT'D)  
Sherry, page Ron Hunt.

Manfred sags into one of the seats.

Bev enters and he perks up.

BEV  
I was just thinking about you.

She smiles.

BEV (CONT'D)  
You must be a very bad boy, Mr. Smith. Sherry, is Ms. Lukens in her office?

SHERRY  
I think so.

Sherry eyes Manfred warily.

Bev goes past her desk and into Lizzy's office. Ron Hunt comes in the door.

RON  
Hey, Mr. Smith. Did I get a part?

MANFRED  
Yeah.

RON  
Cool.

He goes into the principal's office.

INT. OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Ron comes out the door. As he passes Mr. Smith, he winks at him.

RON  
See you at practice.

David motions for Manfred who goes into the inner sanctum.

DAVID  
Ron corroborated your story.

MANFRED

He did?

DAVID

Be grateful, but let me warn you.  
If you piss off Mrs. Long, you'll  
be on thin ice.

INT. HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Manfred walks into the hallway only to find Tessa waiting for him.

TESSA

I'm going to tell my mom.

MANFRED

That's a very adult way to handle  
the situation.

Tessa throws the three playbooks at Manfred's feet.

TESSA

They were stupid.

MANFRED

So, I guess I can scratch you off  
the list.

TESSA

It's just a lame high school play.  
I'm going to try out for the one at  
the college.

MANFRED

I'm sure they would have a small  
part for you.

Tessa storms away.

Manfred walks to his room, and when he turns the corner in his hallway, he spies Ron, stops, and sighs.

MANFRED (CONT'D)

I guess I owe you.

RON

You don't owe me anything. I'm  
getting a chance I've never gotten  
before. I promise you I can act  
Wooden with the best of them.

INT. COUNSELOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Manfred sits opposite Lizzy.

LIZZY

How are you feeling?

MANFRED

Depressed. I didn't know how much I would miss Kally once she was gone. And seeing her every day ...

LIZZY

Maybe it isn't so much that you miss her as it is that you miss having someone.

MANFRED

It got so bad I thought about trying to reconcile with her.

LIZZY

Don't do that.

She puts her hand over Manfred's.

LIZZY (CONT'D)

I think that would be a grave mistake.

MANFRED

I know.

LIZZY

What about the other girl you were interested in?

MANFRED

I don't want to talk about her.

LIZZY

How about your drinking?

MANFRED

I don't want to talk about that either.

LIZZY

Okay, then, maybe another time. How about another session at my place ...you can sort through some of the issues that are holding you back. Saturday evening?

MANFRED

I have play practice.

LIZZY

Sunday? Sixish?

MANFRED

I'll try.

LIZZY

You should do more than try. You aren't the only one affected by the turmoil you're going through. ... How is play practice going?

MANFRED

Rough. Two more weeks until opening night.

INT. RUN-DOWN BAR - NIGHT

Manfred sits alone on a bar stool. The bar is kind of a dive. Music from a juke box, old rock and country. Dim lights. A few shady-looking extras lurking about. A couple of women sitting on bar stools.

One sits by Manfred and smiles at him. He ignores her.

The barkeep, VENICE, close to Manfred's age, a tattoo on her right arm -- a quill poised over an inkwell, red ink dripping from the quill to the inkwell, and underneath: Words Matter; She's a little flirtacious, but at first, Manfred doesn't notice. She taps the bar in front of him to get his attention.

VENICE

Can I make you another drink?

MANFRED

Sure.

VENICE

You've never been in here before.

MANFRED

I'm trying to keep a low profile.

She mixes him a drink and sets it in front of him. He takes a swig.

VENICE

I guess I shouldn't ask you your name, then.

MANFRED

Huh?

VENICE

If you're keeping a low profile.

Manfred CHUCKLES.

MANFRED

I'm ... Manny ... Manny Smith.

VENICE

And I'm Venice.

(rhymes with Denise)

It's spelled like the city.

Manfred looks puzzled as he takes another big drink.

VENICE (CONT'D)

My mom and dad went to Italy on their honeymoon. When I came along ... that's how I got my name. So, what do you do, Manny?

MANFRED

I warp the minds of today's youth.

He finishes his drink.

VENICE

You get paid for that?

MANFRED

I'm an educator. And a play director I guess. Could I have another? I just suffered through an atrocious practice.

VENICE

Teaching is better than this gig. I know a teacher who does pretty well for herself.

Venice glances off into space.

VENICE (CONT'D)

But we do have one thing in common.

MANFRED

Really.

VENICE

Trouble with men.

MANFRED

I don't have trouble with men.

VENICE

My friend ... not you.

She laughs and hands him another drink.

MANFRED

I also do a little freelance writing.

VENICE

I write poetry.

MANFRED

Me too. Maybe I could read your work sometime.

VENICE

I get off at 2.

INT. VENICE'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The outside door opens and Manfred stumbles as he tries to step over the door stoop. Venice steadies him and GIGGLES.

VENICE

You maybe drank a little too much.

MANFRED

(slurring slightly)

I must disagree. You can never drink too much.

She leads him to the couch where he plops down heavily.

VENICE

I'm going to have to catch up to you.

She picks up a notebook, the kind students use in school, with perforated edges so the pages can be torn out easily. She offers it to Manfred.

VENICE (CONT'D)

Are you sure you wouldn't mind looking at them? People tell me they're pretty good.

She disappears off camera and Manfred opens to the first page. Then, he flips to a page in the middle.

VENICE (O.C.) (CONT'D)  
You want a beer?

MANFRED  
Sure.

Manfred reading intently from her poetry notebook does not notice that Venice has come back into the living room wearing only a robe.

Manfred flips to the back of the book.

MANFRED (CONT'D)  
Hey, these are good.

He finally notices her.

MANFRED (CONT'D)  
Venice, your words in here  
(Indicating the book)  
Are great, better than almost  
anything else I've read, even my  
own. ... But I don't think I could  
ever use the right words to  
describe you.

VENICE  
Then, you'll have to find some  
other way.

INT. VENICE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

A light pops on. Manny sits up, THUMPING his feet angrily on the floor.

Venice puts a reassuring hand on his back.

VENICE  
It can happen to anyone.

MANFRED  
It's never happened to me.

VENICE  
Maybe I did something wrong.

MANFRED  
That has to be it.

VENICE  
Or maybe it was your drunk-ass  
fault. Let yourself out.

MANFRED  
I thought maybe --

VENICE  
Go to hell.

She lies back down on the bed and turns her back to Manfred who grabs his clothes, and wearing nothing but a grimace and his underwear, stomps out of the room.

INT. VENICE'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

MANFRED  
Bitch.

He starts for the door, but her poetry book catches his eye and he opens it while furtively looking towards the bedroom. He studies the poem, picks four of them, and carefully tears them out of the notebook at the perforations. He folds them carefully and puts them in his shirt pocket. Only then does he leave.

INT. LIZZIE'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Manfred, a disheveled mess, wearing the same clothes as he had on the night before, comes in through the front door. Lizzy jumps to her feet and hurries to greet him. She pulls up just as she is about to hug him.

LIZZY  
Have you had a bath lately?

MANFRED  
I didn't have time. I was up late --

LIZZY  
Play practice didn't go well?

He sits in the chair. Lizzy looks and sighs, then slowly sits on the couch.

MANFRED  
I overslept and I didn't want to be late because I'm so stressed and you're the only one I can talk to, and do you know I might lose my job because that little bitch told her mother --

LIZZY  
Stop right there.

MANFRED  
She may look like a kid --

LIZZY  
Stop.

Her voice is firm enough that he does.

LIZZY (CONT'D)  
Are you listening to yourself?

MANFRED  
You wouldn't happen to have a beer,  
would you? Because I could really  
go for a nice cold --

LIZZY  
You need treatment, not beer.  
You're manic.

MANFRED  
And what kind of treatment do I  
need?

LIZZY  
Bipolar sufferers are mostly  
treated with medication.

MANFRED  
Mostly?

LIZZY  
Sometimes doctors use  
electroconvulsive therapy in cases  
where a patient might be dangerous  
or suicidal.

MANFRED  
I'm not dangerous.

LIZZY  
You're manic. And manic people do  
stupid things.

MANFRED  
I don't do stupid things.

LIZZY  
When did you go to bed last night?

MANFRED  
I have insomnia. I try to sleep ...

He realizes he might be saying a little too much so when he doesn't finish his sentence, Lizzy sighs and goes into the kitchen to get him a beer. He fidgets the whole time she is gone. Tapping his feet on the floor and his fingers on his knees.

Lizzy comes back and notices some of his fidgeting.

LIZZY

Do you realize how much you fidget?  
You can't sleep because you're  
manic. I'm surprised you can do  
much of anything, much less teach.

MANFRED

I do my job.

LIZZY

Have you ever been so lost in your  
classroom that you don't know what  
you're going to do next?

He doesn't answer her.

LIZZY (CONT'D)

When you're manic, you can't  
control your brain enough to do  
anything well.

MANFRED

You don't know what I can do.

LIZZY

Then tell me.

MANFRED

I write poetry.

LIZZY

That's a good way to sort through  
your feelings, but --

MANFRED

My poetry is kick ass.

LIZZY

I don't want to be cruel, but  
people who have bipolar disorder  
often have delusions that they do  
everything better than they  
actually do.

He reaches into his shirt pocket and pulls out the poetry he stole from Venice.

MANFRED

I can show you.

He takes a swig of his beer and sets it down with a SLAM. He walks over to Lizzy and drops the poems he stole from Venice into her lap.

MANFRED (CONT'D)

Read them.

She frowns but then unfolds them and starts to read as Manfred goes back to his chair. As he guzzles his beer, Lizzy reads. Finally she looks back up.

LIZZY

When did you write these?

MANFRED

I ... uh ... they came to me last night ... when I couldn't sleep.

LIZZY

I think these are publishable.

MANFRED

You do?

She frowns, studies him closely.

LIZZY

It's almost like someone else --

MANFRED

They're mine!

LIZZY

You are so tense.

MANFRED

(mocking)

When you're manic, you get stressed.

Lizzy ignores him and pats the couch.

LIZZY

Come over here and sit. I'll get you another beer. I can help you relax.

Manfred sets the poems down on a coffee table and then he sits on the opposite end of the couch from where Lizzy was sitting.

When Lizzy comes back with his beer, she pauses briefly and then sits right beside him. He starts as if he's going to get up, but she grabs his elbow. Lizzy LAUGHS.

LIZZY (CONT'D)  
Close your eyes.

Lizzy begins to massage his neck. He first GRUNTS in surprise and pain, but within seconds, he begins to relax.

LIZZY (CONT'D)  
I dated a masseuse, but he got a little too handsy.

MANFRED  
Damn, that feels good.

LIZZY  
Your shoulders and your neck are in knots. It's no wonder you can't relax.

She works his back and side, and then she stands.

LIZZY (CONT'D)  
Lie down on the floor. I'll give you the works.

He does as she asks him to. Lizzy straddles him and sits on him -- butt to butt. This doesn't seem to affect Manfred as she begins to massage his shoulders.

LIZZY (CONT'D)  
We can't communicate if you can't relax.

Manfred CHUCKLES.

MANFRED  
So this is some devious scheme to get me to tell you all my deep secrets.

LIZZY  
Maybe.

She kneads his lower back. She puts pressure on an especially tense spot, and Manfred jumps a little.

LIZZY (CONT'D)  
I can't believe the tension in these muscles. Some are hard as rocks.

Her hands move just to the top of his buttocks, and she slides back and sits on his legs.

LIZZY (CONT'D)

For a long time, my masseuse friend made me believe that naked massages were the only ones that worked.

She's now kneading the top part of his butt cheeks.

MANFRED

That feels so good.

LIZZY

Why haven't you talked to that woman you like?

MANFRED

How do you know I haven't?

LIZZY

I have my ways.

She works on his butt.

MANFRED

Don't you think you might be getting too personal there?

LIZZY

The ass is just another muscle.

MANFRED

I'm afraid to talk to her.

Lizzy massages his upper thighs.

LIZZY

You're an adult. For all you know, she may be dying to talk to you.

She moves her hands close to his testicles.

He rolls over, and she tumbles onto the floor.

MANFRED

What are you doing?

She rises to her knees, crouched like an animal about to pounce and that's what she does. She barrels into his chest and knocks him to the ground. She kisses him, but he pushes her away.

LIZZY  
If you're not going to talk to me,  
I'm going to --

He scrambles out from under her.

MANFRED  
You don't understand -- you -- I  
have to go.

He bolts toward the door leaving her sitting on the floor and  
the poems sitting on the coffee table.

INT. TEACHER'S LOUNGE - DAY

Eric and Manfred sit at one end of the table. Kally comes in,  
starts to leave, but then sits at the other end of the table,  
roughly six chairs away from Eric and Manfred.

ERIC  
I heard the play went great last  
night.

MANFRED  
Surprisingly well, thanks to Ron  
and Haley. They were spectacular.

ERIC  
I also heard that Tess and Mrs.  
Long were there.

MANFRED  
Looking for some reason to fire me.

ERIC  
No doubt.

MANFRED  
You coming tonight?

ERIC  
Yeah.

They eat a few bites in silence. Kally stares at them. Eric  
notices but not Manfred. Eric returns Kally's glare.

ERIC (CONT'D)  
How are you and Lizzy doing?

Kally flinches.

MANFRED  
We're not doing anything.

ERIC  
She really likes you.

MANFRED  
She's not my type.

Kally gets up to leave as Lizzy comes in.

KALLY  
You don't know what your type is.

She pauses at the door.

LIZZY  
I'm coming to the play tonight,  
Manny.

MANFRED  
Uh, huh.

He's not paying much attention to Lizzy, just watching Kally as she stands in the doorway and listens.

LIZZY  
And I, uh, wanted to apologize.

MANFRED  
No problem.

LIZZY  
I also wanted to tell you that you need to send those poems off to a publisher. They're in my office. You left them at the house when ... well, you know.

KALLY  
You wrote some publishable poetry?

MANFRED  
I told you I was a good poet.

KALLY  
So how many good poems did you write? One? Two?

MANFRED  
Everything I write is good.

KALLY  
How many poems does *Lizzy* think are actually publishable?

MANFRED

Four.

Kally suddenly leaves.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Manfred steps into the hallway, just as the Intercom goes off.

INTERCOM

Mr. Smith, would you please come to the office?

MANFRED

Shit. Mrs. Long probably told him about the word "hell" in act two.

He starts up the hallway and spies Bev coming toward him.

MANFRED (CONT'D)

Are you going to the play tonight?

BEV

I think so.

MANFRED

It's a good one.

BEV

I've heard that it is. And to think you wrote it. You might be a celebrity one of these days.

She walks past him.

INTERCOM

Mr. Smith, please come to the office.

MANFRED

(to himself)

Now's the time.

He takes a deep breath.

MANFRED (CONT'D)

Bev. Wait.

BEV

You should be going to the office.

MANFRED

Would you like to go out ... for dinner sometime.

BEV

No. Ask Lizzy; she's dying to go out with you.

INTERCOM

Mr. Smith, please come to the office now.

Manfred turns to the Intercom.

MANFRED

Would you shut the hell up!

Students stop in the hallway and look at him.

MANFRED (CONT'D)

Go to class.

He hurries toward the office. When he goes through the office door he sees Mr. Milburn first, then ... Venice. As their eyes lock, Lizzy comes from her office with the poems in her hands.

LIZZY

Oh, there you are.

VENICE

That's the bastard who stole my poetry!

MANFRED

I don't know what --

VENICE

We got drunk and went to my apartment. He left me in bed and stole my poems as he left.

MANFRED

That's crazy.

Lizzy stomps forward and sets the poetry on the office counter.

LIZZY

How could you?

She whirls around and goes back toward her office. Mr. Milburn picks the poems up.

DAVID  
Are these the ones?

He hands them over to Venice who glances at them.

VENICE  
Thank God.

MANFRED  
I can explain.

DAVID  
There's no need. If Mrs. Long recommends that your contract not be renewed, I will support her.

INT. AUDITORIUM/MANFRED'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Manfred stands stage right just by some steps that lead up to the stage floor. He is blindfolded, his hands tied behind his back.

Mr. Milburn has him by the left arm and Tessa by the right.

Sitting in the front row of the auditorium are Lizzy, Bev, Eric, Kally, Ron, and Haley.

Milburn and Tessa half pull and half push Manfred up the stairs where a scaffold awaits.

Sitting stage left is a long table.

Name tags sit before five people.

The first tag sits before a middle-aged woman who wears a white wig and a judge's robe. This placard says, "Long." Four men sit around the table also. Their placards have the word "board" on them. They're dressed the same as Mrs. Long.

Milburn and Tessa led Manfred to the stairs of the scaffold.

MANFRED  
Where am I going?

TESSA  
(dramatically)  
Nowhere.

A DRUM ROLL begins in the background. When the three of them get to the scaffold's top, Milburn puts a noose around Manfred's neck.

MANFRED

(slurs)  
What's that?

TESSA

A nice tie for your last play.

DAVID

Ever. Board?

Mrs. Long hits the table with her gavel.

MRS. LONG

Guilty!

Board members chant.

BOARD MEMBERS

Guilty! Guilty! Guilty!

Tessa pulls the lever and ... Manfred jerks on his couch in the living room of his home.

His eyes, staring into space, blink, and he comes to himself. He notices that he has a beer can in his hand, so he finishes it off, crumples it and tosses it toward a trash can. The can misses and falls to the floor CLANKING against several other cans lying there.

Manfred looks at his clock and stands, his clothes rumpled and his tie askew. He makes his way toward the door.

INT. AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

Manfred half walks and half staggers into the auditorium. Several kids mill about, some getting makeup, some adjusting scenery on the stage.

Ron comes out to meet Manfred. He stops when he gets a few feet away from him.

RON

Are you all right?

MANFRED

Just get up there and do the damn play.

Ron sadly shakes his head. He turns around and YELLS at the other kids.

RON

45 minutes until curtain. Off the stage and into the dressing rooms.

The kids file offstage leaving only Haley and Ron who has joined her on stage.

HALEY

I didn't think he'd do something like this to us.

RON

He's got problems. We're going to have to do this *for* him. You keep the girls in line and I'll take the boys.

They both walk offstage. Manfred sits in the last chair in the front row, stage right. He closes his eyes.

INT. AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

A spotlight is on Ron.

RON

A lot goes on in a school. Some good stuff. Some bad. I hope you have all enjoyed this behind the walls look at our school -- or should I say -- "Through the walls." I gotta go now. I'm due for a polish.

The lights fade out and the curtain closes. Applause fills the auditorium.

INT. AUDITORIUM - MOMENTS LATER

Most of the people have left the auditorium. Manfred still sits in his seat. He stares at the stage.

From behind him ...

ERIC

I've got to say. You handled that a lot better than I would have.

Manfred slowly stands and looks at him. He sees that Eric is holding Bev's hands.

MANFRED

You son of a bitch.

He lunges forward and knocks Eric to the ground. He punches him, and Bev screams. A few men, including Milburn, rush forward and pull him off Eric.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Two policemen stand in Milburn's office, one on each side of Manfred who can't even look at David.

DAVID

You're finished here. Do yourself a favor, Mr. Smith, get some help. Be thankful that Eric is not pressing charges. Officers, please escort him to his car.

INT. MANFRED'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Manfred sits on his couch. He opens a bottle of pills, puts a handful in his mouth and washes them down with a drink of beer.

He gags a little and coughs but takes another drink. He pours out another handful of pills and repeats the process. This time they go down smoothly.

Someone knocks on his door, but he doesn't hear it. He empties the bottle into his hand, puts the pills in his mouth, and drinks another swig of beer.

He chugs the rest of the beer and crumples it up. He tosses it in the general direction of the trash can, misses, and it bounces off another pile of empties. He lies down.

Glass SHATTERS.

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Manfred lies on the hospital bed. His eyes blink, he groans a little bit. A nurse, IONA, leans over his bed. Slowly, Manfred opens his eyes and looks around a little.

MANFRED

Where am I?

IONA

St. Mark's Hospital.

MANFRED

Why ...

His voice trails off.

IONA  
You almost died of an overdose.  
Xanax and alcohol.

MANFRED  
Shit.

He closes his eyes and drifts away. Lizzy enters the room.

IONA  
He woke up long enough to say shit.

Lizzy LAUGHS briefly and then stops. Manfred opens his eyes.

LIZZY  
What's going to happen next?

IONA  
The doctor will give him all the  
options -- one of which will not be  
taking Xanax -- including therapy.

LIZZY  
He's bipolar. He needs some serious  
help.

IONA  
The doctors have come to the same  
conclusion. You do realize that  
unless he gets committed by a judge  
that he can refuse any treatment we  
suggest.

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Dr. FRANKLIN SHORT, sits by Manfred whose hospital bed is  
raised enough that he sits up.

FRANKLIN  
You have bipolar II. If you don't  
get treatment, you'll be in serious  
trouble.

MANFRED  
What are my options?

FRANKLIN  
You tried to kill yourself. It  
wasn't just a cry for help like  
some people talk about.

(MORE)

FRANKLIN (CONT'D)

If you hadn't been found, you would have succeeded. Are you ready to tell me that you're not going to try it again?

Manfred is silent.

FRANKLIN (CONT'D)

If you don't get treatment for your illness your odds of succeeding at killing yourself increase dramatically.

MANFRED

Could you give me some pills?

FRANKLIN

I think you need an aggressive treatment first, something that will stabilize you immediately. Then, we can treat you with Depakote or Lithium long term.

MANFRED

I don't have much to live for, but I'm not sure I want to die.

FRANKLIN

I also want to get you into a rehabilitation center for alcohol abuse.

MANFRED

You want to take away my beer?

He CHUCKLES.

MANFRED (CONT'D)

Just kill me now.

Franklin is not amused.

FRANKLIN

I can't force you to take treatments, and even if I did, the likelihood of them doing much good are slim. You have to make the decision.

MANFRED

I'll do whatever it takes.

FRANKLIN

Before you agree to anything, you need to understand what I think I want to do. Have you ever heard of ECT?

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Manfred is in his hospital gown lying on a gurney. Franklin stands next to him.

FRANKLIN

Do you feel up to a visitor before you go in for your first treatment?

MANFRED

A visitor? I didn't think I had any friends left.

FRANKLIN

Apparently you have one.

MANFRED

I better talk to him quickly since I might not remember him later.

FRANKLIN

Her.

He leaves the room and Lizzy enters.

MANFRED

Lizzy. Why are you here?

LIZZY

You pissed me off, but I don't hate you. What you've done doesn't really surprise me.

She sits in a chair next to his bed.

MANFRED

I'm scared.

LIZZY

You shouldn't be. Forget the old movies. ECT is a very safe procedure these days.

MANFRED

The doctor tells me I might forget things, events ... people.

LIZZY

It usually doesn't last long, and most of what you forget are the events right before you have ECT.

He smiles.

MANFRED

That might not be such a bad idea.

He reaches out to take her hand.

MANFRED (CONT'D)

I promise I won't forget you.

Franklin and Iona, plus a couple of others, come back into the room.

Lizzy leans over the bed and kisses his cheek.

The nurses wheel him away and leave Lizzy standing in the room.

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Manfred opens his eyes. Franklin stands beside him.

MANFRED

I have a splitting headache.

He looks around.

MANFRED (CONT'D)

Where am I?

FRANKLIN

How do you feel?

MANFRED

Fuzzy. Blank. And I'm sore all over.

FRANKLIN

These are all common side effects from your treatment -- do you remember why you're here?

Manfred thinks for a minute.

MANFRED

Bipolar. Suicidal ideations. I got that treatment. You know the one --

FRANKLIN  
ECT.

MANFRED  
Right. That.

FRANKLIN  
You have a visitor.

He leaves Iona to tend to Manfred. Lizzy comes into the room. She pauses at the entrance. Manfred stares at her, looking confused.

MANFRED  
Hi ... uh ... uh ....

LIZZY  
(sighing, then)  
Lizzy.

MANFRED  
How do I know you?

LIZZY  
We are ... friends.

MANFRED  
I'm sorry. I ... you know ... the  
ECT.

LIZZY  
I know.

MANFRED  
Lizzy. What's your last name,  
Lizzy?

LIZZY  
Luchens.

MANFRED  
Oh, I know that name.

She brightens up, a smile across her face.

MANFRED (CONT'D)  
Dr. Short says you're going to be  
my therapist.

She loses her smile.

LIZZY  
What?

MANFRED

He recommended you. He said ...

He pauses and searches for words.

MANFRED (CONT'D)

He said that you would be good for me as long as you could keep your professional objectivity. I'm not sure what he means by that.

LIZZY

(laughs)

I think I can work you in.

She looks longingly at Manfred.

LIZZY (CONT'D)

I guess I should go now. I'll schedule an appointment for you.

She starts to leave.

MANFRED

Oh, Miss Luchens. Just one more thing.

She turns back to him.

MANFRED (CONT'D)

My muscles are really sore. Does psychotherapy include a massage?

He smiles.

She hurries to him and hugs him.

LIZZY

You crazy S.O.B.

FADE TO:

INT. AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

Manfred sits on the back row of an auditorium. Lizzy stands behind him and rubs his neck.

The auditorium is full; house lights are dim.

On stage a group of actors bow, and the crowd APPLAUDS. The closed curtain pops open and Haley and Tessa come onto stage for even more thunderous APPLAUSE.

The two hold hands and bow. The curtain pops open once more and Ron comes out and bows. Even greater APPLAUSE.

He and the two girls join hands, and then they join hands with the rest of the performers and all bow together. People CHEER and stand on their feet.

House lights come up.

An EMCEE comes through the curtains and walks toward a podium on the right hand side of the stage. He holds his hands up to silence the crowd.

The emcee is pale, with long, curly black hair, and he wears a black suit with a pale white tie.

He steps up to the microphone.

EMCEE

Ladies and gentlemen, the show is not over. In our audience tonight are Manfred Smith and his wife Lizzy.

The crowd whirls around to see. Lizzy prods Manfred to get up. He stands to great APPLAUSE.

EMCEE (CONT'D)

It's my pleasure to announce that

He pauses for dramatic effect.

EMCEE (CONT'D)

That Manfred Smith has been selected as the playwright of the year for the Greater Midwest Repertory Theater.

Manfred sways and supports himself on the seats in front of him.

EMCEE (CONT'D)

Mr. Smith, the podium is yours!

Manfred makes his way toward the stage while Lizzy stands back. The crowd APPLAUDS more loudly the closer he gets to the stage.

He finally reaches stage right and climbs the steps.

At the Podium, the Emcee takes a step back.

The applause fades away.

MANFRED

And to think I was going to be a poet.

The crowd LAUGHS. He looks into the audience.

MANFRED (CONT'D)

Sorry, Venice.

He waves to her. Sitting in the front row, she waves back.

MANFRED (CONT'D)

I honestly don't know what to say.

In the front row besides Venice are Dr. Short, Iona, Dave Milburn, Mrs. Long, Eric, and Beverly.

MANFRED (CONT'D)

I want to thank you all for supporting this production of my new play, *Massage*.

He waves to Lizzy in the back and she waves back at him.

MANFRED (CONT'D)

So many people have made this possible.

Another round of APPLAUSE.

MANFRED (CONT'D)

I have some more news to pass along. At intermission, I got a call from my agent. *Massage* is going to New York City for an off-broadway production.

The crowd ERUPTS.

People throw flowers on the stage. One hits Manfred in the eye. He shields his face and closes both eyes for a second. When he opens them back up, the house lights are dark, but the stage is lit.

The auditorium is empty.

He walks downstage center and peers out into the darkness, but spotlights blind him.

MANFRED (CONT'D)

Hello.

The lights to his left dim into darkness. When he gazes there, the ones to his right begin to dim.

MANFRED (CONT'D)

Give me light.

The stage lights behind him dim also. Everything is black but one spotlight glaring down on Manfred.

He looks up to the crow's nest and sees one small light pop on up there.

Though the spotlight mostly blinds him, he can make out the fuzzy shape of a single person sitting there.

MANFRED (CONT'D)

Where'd everyone go?

GODITER

The play is over.

The lights in the booth pop off.

The spotlight on Manfred fades slowly to black.

THE END