

BLUE: A TWO-ACT PLAY

By

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Introduction

The plot of *Blue* centers on a dyslexic teen named Danny. Through his guidance counselor Mr. Wolf (secretly an alien, of course), Danny comes into contact with a mysterious blue slime, referred to simply as Blue. After taking Blue, Danny experiences a drastic improvement in his academic performance. However, this success is tainted by the fact that with Danny becomes progressively more short-tempered with his family.

My primary objective in writing this play was to use science fiction elements as the springboard for a moral drama in which Danny is torn by the desire for freedom and the need to repair his struggling family. Blue is introduced in the first scene, and it remains present throughout the play. However, the fact that Blue may be extraterrestrial is secondary to Danny's moral choices. On numerous occasions, Mr. Wolf hints at Blue's origins. This elusiveness serves to entice and conflict Danny, but at no point do the science fiction elements rise to the surface. Even when, during the climax, Mr. Wolf explicitly states that he is an alien, there is no onstage proof of this claim. Danny's conflict arises not from the science fiction aspects of the plot but from whether or not he should

continue taking a substance that is both a blessing and a curse.

The fact that Blue is otherworldly also provided a certain degree of abstractness, which allowed me to explore universal themes and motifs without being hampered by the social connotations associated with a real-life substance or issue. For instance, Blue could be interpreted as a stand-in for a real-world drug or performance enhancer, but it could also be viewed as manifestation of other kinds of addiction, be they mental or emotional. This allegorical nature allowed me to keep the science fiction aspects of the narrative in the background and focus on Danny's moral dilemma.

During the creation of *Blue, Limitless*, a film adaptation of Alan Glynn's *Dark Fields*, was released. Like *Blue*, it featured a protagonist, Eddie Morra (Bradley Cooper), who obtains a mysterious substance (here called NZT) that increases his intelligence almost supernaturally. In addition to completing his long-unfinished novel, Eddie launches himself into the world of corporate finance, where he struggles to coordinate a massive merger while dodging murder charges and fending off a Russian thug who also wants NZT.

Structurally, *Limitless* treats its science-fiction substance in a manner very similar to Blue. It uses NZT as a springboard into a

genre other than science fiction—in this case, action-thriller. Eddie is eager to obtain more NZT and modify it for his own purposes, but he is less concerned with the NZT's origin than its capacity to be reverse engineered. As a result, *Limitless*, like *Blue*, leaves its science fiction premise behind early in the plot. Shortly after first ingesting NZT, Eddie is caught up in the murder of Vernon (Johnny Whitworth), his ex-brother-in-law and the one who introduces him to NZT. After that, the film shifts into action-thriller mode, alternating between the rush of NZT-fueled success and the panic of mortal danger. Whereas *Blue's* focus contracts as the plot progresses, the perspective of *Limitless* continues to expand.

Indeed, the film's change in title from *The Dark Fields* to *Limitless* is not arbitrary. It indicates the filmmakers' intention to explore just how far an individual will go for the sake of success. During an early montage of Eddie's transformation, he slickly states what could be considered the thesis for the whole movie: "There are no safeguards in human nature. We're wired to overreach."

Blue, on the other hand, is very concerned with limits. Danny is not interested in overreaching. His goal is always the same: to

leave town. Even with his newly acquired intelligence, he is still hindered by the same temperamental flaws, and he tries to overcome those flaws by *acting* confident. This pretension extends throughout the entire play, culminating in his delusional pomposity in front of reporter Aubrey Sanchez. The cautionary message of *Limitless* comes from the fact that Eddie eventually gets everything he wants, that he is a man who is truly limitless. For *Blue*, however, I wanted to show how Danny's narcissism affects those closest to him. This means that, aside from Danny's academic success, Blue's effects are destructive.

Viewing *Limitless* helped identify certain generic conventions of increased-intelligence narratives. For example, if the protagonist is initially unfamiliar with the substance (be it a slime or a pill), then someone must introduce him to the substance. In other words, there must be a "devil" who makes a Faustian offer to the protagonist. The nature of the devil in both narratives is a direct reflection of the nature and drive of the protagonist.

In *Limitless*, Eddie's "devil," Vernon (Eddie's ex-brother-in-law and a known drug dealer), is quickly murdered and cannot act as significant opposition. After one dose of NZT, Eddie's sole desire is

to continue on this trajectory. Even when he's not on NZT, his desire is to get more so he can sustain his newfound high. His girlfriend Lindy would be a likely antagonist to this desire, but she exits the film early, as well.

Therefore, the central opposition to Eddie's limitless desire is corporate tycoon Carl Van Loon. Though immensely successful, Carl preaches the gospel of paying one's dues. Carl's opposition is significant because he represents the last level of opposition to Eddie's seemingly unstoppable trajectory. Unaware of NZT, Carl is the pinnacle of what the human race can achieve without enhancement, but he is no match for this "gutsy little schmuck" on NZT. Therefore, Eddie, confident in his new performance enhancer, disregards Carl's advice/warning, and defeats him. -

How different, then, is Danny Dravecky and, by extension, Mr. Wolf, who is both the initial "devil" and Danny's central opposition. Because these two functions are combined in one character, the nature of the conflict changes. Danny, whose desire does not change, must challenge Mr. Wolf's assertion that it's okay to cheat in order to succeed. Mr. Wolf believes that Danny is worthy of the advantage because his need is strong and his character is solid. Although both

Carl and Mr. Wolf seek to guide their young protégés in a certain direction, they do so for different reasons and through different methods. Carl Van Loon is shocked by Eddie's boldness and tries to temper it. Meanwhile, Mr. Wolf feeds Danny's feeble ego, trying to turn him into some kind of intellectual peer.

Analogically speaking, if Carl is cautioning Eddie about steroid use, then Mr. Wolf is the one giving Danny the steroids. As the parent of a toddler, I have become wary of sending my daughter off to school, fearful that what she hears or sees will negate my work as a parent. I believe that this current fear of mine played into the relationship between Danny and Mr. Wolf, who literally poisons the boy against his own family. The frightening aspect of this relationship is the fact that, in his mind, Mr. Wolf's actions are truly altruistic.

Another scene in *Limitless* that sparked my interest was the dinner scene between Eddie and the estranged Lindy. As someone who intimately knew Eddie before his NZT boost, Lindy is the best litmus test for measuring the transformation. The audience has already witnessed the break-up scene. There was no anger, no tears—just pity. By the dinner scene, though, Eddie is no longer the pitifully

dependent slacker she broke up with. When apologizing for his former behavior, he says all of the right things, and the scene ends with the two “reconnecting.”

Conversely, the dinner scene between Danny and Natalie demonstrates just how little Danny has changed, how he feels compelled to overcompensate for the discrepancy between Natalie and himself. On numerous occasions, he clumsily attempts to steer the conversation towards a more sophisticated topic while Natalie is content with Danny’s company. Danny tries to impress her with newly acquired knowledge, to minimal effect. Eventually, the date dissolves into awkward silence.

Both *Blue* and *Limitless*, more than being “increased intelligence” stories, are “quick fix narratives,” and, as such, an alternative to the quick fix must be presented. In *Limitless*, Carl is the closest thing Eddie has to a father figure. Van Loon paternally warns Eddie of the danger of misusing his abilities. “You do not know what I know because you have not earned those powers,” he says. “You're careless with those powers; you flaunt them and you throw them around like a brat with his trust fund.”

This mentor–apprentice relationship is made tenuous by the fact

that either could betray the other, and in fact, they do. In the film's epilogue, Carl informs Eddie of what he believes to be a checkmate move, but Eddie has already predicted and safeguarded against such a move, thereby eliminating Carl as an antagonist. He further embarrasses his former mentor by correctly diagnosing a heart condition. Because a corporate competitor is the closest thing that Eddie has to a father, it indicates just how truly lonely his ascent has been and will continue to be. Without the ability to trust or be trusted, Eddie can never sustain a genuine relationship. However, that doesn't seem to bother him.

Because *Blue* is primarily a domestic drama (with a science fiction twist), Danny's voice of caution and reason comes from the home. Like Carl Van Loon, Danny's father Bob tries to bring Danny back to Earth. However, unlike Carl, Bob's professional life is unfulfilling, which initially gives Danny ammunition for opposing his father's ideology. Danny is, like Eddie, capable of embarrassing his father figure. However, as we shall see, Bob eventually leads his son by example and humbles himself to demonstrate to his son that happiness can be achieved without artificial assistance.

Daniel Robert Dravecky

After numerous revisions of *Blue*, one theme emerged that I had not intended: fatherhood. Originally, Bob, Danny's father, did not appear until the final scene in the hospital. With each subsequent draft, though, I found myself expanding the character. For the family in drama, the concepts of death and meaning are bound up in the father figure. As the father is aware of these realities, so are they conveyed to the rest of the family. Because Bob Dravecky is unaware of them, recovering and understanding these realities become central to Danny's redemption.

At the start of the play, Danny, a dyslexic, is nervous and insecure. He answers Mr. Wolf with one-word responses, if he responds at all, and he has trouble making eye contact. He struggles to discover and define his life goal. In the first scene, he informs Mr. Wolf that he would like to change his career goal (again) from limo driver to sports agent. He is also desperate to leave his hometown, fearful of working at the same factory as his father.

MR. WOLF: How important is it to you that you leave this town?

DANNY: Really important.

MR. WOLF: What are you willing to do?

DANNY: I'll do anything, Mr. Wolf. I'll do extra credit, I'll take summer school. I just need to get out of here. (26-7)

Without any specific objective, this vague desire to move out renders Danny's dream of success malleable. This malleability, in turn, makes Danny vulnerable to Mr. Wolf's temptation of success through *Blue*, an extraterrestrial

slime that grants the subject the ability to achieve his or her deepest desire. In Danny's case, it makes him drastically smarter and (temporarily) cures his dyslexia.

After taking Blue, Danny becomes arrogant. He starts to look down on the rest of his family. Confident that he has acquired the means to escape his current confinement, he wields his newfound knowledge and intellectual capacity, oblivious to the effect that it has on his family and girlfriend, Natalie. Ultimately, he becomes addicted to Blue, taking more than the amount "prescribed" by Mr. Wolf. This leads to his eventual hospitalization, during which he must confront what he has become and what he wants to be. At the climax of his conflict with Mr. Wolf, he is emboldened by a conversation with his father, Bob, who uses his experience as a recovering alcoholic to redeem his son.

Throughout this drama, parallels develop between father and son, revealing that Danny has been imitating his father all along and that Bob sees himself in Danny. The son's malleability takes its root in Bob, who, though hard-working, is non-committal and uninvolved. Because of this connection, Bob is the only person who can rescue Danny and thwart the distorted paternal efforts of Mr. Wolf.

Breaking the Cycle

According to Judith Butler, gender imitation precedes and is essential for the formation of self ("Imitation" 1717). Whether or not one accepts the notion that the entire self resides in the act of gender performance, Butler is correct to point out that gender imitation is fundamental to identity. And she is also astute to note that this imitative performance is compulsory (1715). Regardless of where the reader stands

on the issue, sons imitate their fathers, or in Butler's terms, sons perform their fathers' genders. Peter Brooks provides a possible explanation for this imitation when he describes the possibility that every narrative (and human desire) is a yearning for a return to the beginning (1170). In this instance, Brooks is discussing actual narratives, but if we take Butler into account, then we can regard parents (in our case, fathers) as "gender texts," open to reading, interpretation, and performance.

Unfortunately, as Brooks points out, the past is irretrievable. And any attempt to resurrect it will inevitably be insufficient. As Brooks puts it, "all we can do is subvert, or, perhaps better, pervert time" (1171). Extending this idea to gender performance, the son's imitation will always result in some type of distortion of the father's masculinity.

When, if ever, does the son break free of this imitation and form his own identity? To put it another way, when does the son "become his own man"? For Butler, "the self only becomes a self on the condition that it has suffered a separation," or a loss of some kind ("Imitation" 1717). This loss clears a space for some "Other" to be assimilated into the self. For Brooks, "death—which may be figural but in the classic instances of genre is so often literal—quickens meaning" (1163). So, until the patriarch has passed away, he is still in the process of being "read" by his son.

The solution to this cycle of perverted/subverted performances is for the father to instill some sense of meaning in his family. Such a meaning provides his family (specifically his son) with an objective, an endpoint that is somehow beyond

the deceased father's own identity. If the father properly achieves this function, his family will remain functional in his absence. If he does not, the family will be left in a state of confusion, wondering what their patriarch worked and died for.

Because Bob Dravecky has not established anything resembling a proper legacy for his family, Danny feels compelled to seek out a legacy for himself, and, in turn, exposes himself to unnatural death in the form of Blue.

The word *meaning* is rather vague, and a father could project a variety of "meanings," many of them contradictory. So, for this discussion of patriarchal "meaning," we will use the word *legacy*, thus implying the deepest, most fundamental meaning that the father imparts.

To understand how Bob Dravecky makes his transformation over the course of *Blue*, we must first understand the ideal he will be compared to, as well as other negative examples. Because it offers the closest thing to an "ideal" model of how a father conveys a legacy to his family, *Raisin the Sun* will serve as the starting point for exploring this father-son dynamic.

Raisin in the Sun

The patriarch of the Younger family, Big Walter, has passed away, leaving his family ten thousand dollars from his life insurance policy. His widow, Mama Younger, describes her husband's work ethic, how she watched him grow "thin and old before he was forty" (117). This work ethic, though, does not constitute Big Walter's entire legacy. What he worked for was more important than how he worked.

Meanwhile, Big Walter's son, Walter Lee, is a perpetual schemer, constantly searching for a creative solution to his family's financial troubles. He works, but his work ethic pales in comparison to his father's. His focus is only on the money, prompting him to stay up late (talking about potential investments) and sleep in during the morning (7). When his mother entrusts him with the remainder of the insurance money, Walter Lee squanders the money on a liquor store investment, resulting in Willy Harris fleeing with the Youngers' \$6500. Instead of curing Walter Lee's perverted gender performance, the money only magnifies it.

It is only after he makes the un-pragmatic decision to move his family into an all-white neighborhood that Walter Lee discontinues his perverse performance. Big Walter's legacy is not just the ten thousand dollars; it also encompasses the intangible qualities laid out by Walter Lee in the climax, culminating in the declaration that the Youngers "are very proud people" (138). Ironically, it is by honoring his father's legacy of working for a better life that Walter Lee establishes his own identity as a man. Confronting Lindner, Walter Lee says, "We have decided to move into our house because my father—my father—he earned it" (138). The dream was the legacy for Big Walter, and with a down payment on the house, Walter Lee now has the means to fulfill his father's dream. In order to achieve this goal, Big Walter would have had to commit himself to this purpose, this legacy, long ago. However, it is only after his death that his son truly understands this legacy.

Hansberry's play provides the litmus test for identifying the dysfunction of the Dravecky household in *Blue*. Clearly, Bob Dravecky works a great deal, pulling

double shifts and working odd hours that require him to sleep during the daytime, but if we ask ourselves what Bob Dravecky is working *for*, the answer is not apparent. We can surely guess, but there's no textual evidence to support these guesses.

Because of this lack of legacy, Danny cannot see his father's routine of working at the plant as anything other than miserable. It's understandable, then, that Danny desires to avoid this fate. He never explicitly mentions this, but his outward contempt for the plant is an indirect sign of contempt for the father himself. As a result, Danny is diligent in his school work, convinced it will bring him freedom. However, because Danny's own objective is so vague, he is actually *performing* his father's miserable work ethic. The fact that Danny is working so hard to avoid working at the plant simply makes his performance an unintentional subversion of his own desires. Even more so, Danny's attempts to be a golfer and then a sports agent are direct performances of his father's failed golf career.

Death of a Salesman

As with *Raisin in the Sun*, a life insurance check plays a key role in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. Willy's driving force for committing suicide is the assurance of that his family will receive the twenty thousand dollars.

For years, Willy Loman has instilled in his family the importance of being "well liked." The endpoint, the legacy, of this philosophy is to die "the death of a salesman," with "hundreds of salesmen and buyers" attending the funeral (81).

Like any sons, Biff and Hap perform their father's gender, whether they want to or not. In Peter Brooks' terms, Hap's performance is a *perversion* of his father's gender. His idea of being well-liked is shallow and vain, resulting in superficial relationships and numerous sexual encounters. At one point his own mother calls him a "philandering bum" (57).

Biff's performance, on the other hand, is *subversive* of his father's gender. He has "tramped around," taking job after job for ten years, prompting Willy to refer to him as a "disgrace" (15-6). Nevertheless, "Biff remained a slave to his father's 'phony dream' even after he has rejected his father as a 'phony fake'" (Cohn 53). Biff himself confirms having worked twenty to thirty jobs since leaving home (Miller 22), but he also agonizes over stealing a carton of basketballs ten years before (26). More specifically, he wonders whether Bill Oliver, his former boss, knew about the incident. For all his attempted callousness, Biff is still "too sensitive" (as Hap describes him), too concerned with being well liked. Even though he recognizes that his father's legacy is empty, he cannot break free from that legacy's influence.

Like the Loman brothers, the Dravecky boys in *Blue* imitate their father in different ways, with one brother deliberately *subverting* his father's masculinity while the other unintentionally *perverts* it. Even in light of his father's recovery from alcohol, Jake Dravecky, the elder, still keeps bottles of booze in the house. His actions are a subversive attempt to hold a mirror up to his father's legacy (or lack thereof) so that he can see the consequences of his actions. Danny, meanwhile, has

tried for most of his life to avoid living like his father, illustrated in his direct avoidance of alcohol.

The “Blue-driver” scene provides the clearest illustration of how, despite their efforts, both sons are performing Bob’s alcoholism. Jake reveals that he has a hidden stash of vodka in the kitchen. Eager to make himself a drink, he mixes it with Blue, completely unaware of the substance’s potential. Danny, meanwhile, is so paranoid of repeating his father that he disposes of the mixed drink because of the alcohol, while still intending to take more Blue later on (54). Even though Danny is extremely preoccupied with avoiding alcohol, he is incapable of noticing and controlling his own addictive tendencies.

August: Osage County

If Willy Loman leaves us with any romantic notions of suicide, Beverly Weston, another patriarch, dispels those ideas. Beverly appears only in the first scene of *August: Osage County*. He is in the process of hiring Johnna to help out around the house. According to Beverly, he drinks, and his wife Violet takes pills. Furthermore, the window shades are taped over the windows, and the air conditioner is never on—in Oklahoma. The result is a dismal, depressing cocoon that offers no hope of improvement. For this patriarch, death flows from meaning, not vice versa.

In Beverly’s mind, life has achieved its meaning: *Meadowlark*, his acclaimed poetry collection. Upon finding a copy, Bill, Beverly’s son-in-law, muses, “I can’t imagine the kind of pressure he must’ve felt after this came out.

Probably every word he wrote after this, he had to be thinking, ‘What are they going to say about this? Are they going to compare it to *Meadowlark*?’” (46).

This book was Beverly’s legacy before his life was even complete. His widow, Violet, offers insight after Beverly’s funeral: “Today’s the send-off Bev should’ve got if he died around 1974. Lots of talk about poetry, teaching. Well he hadn’t written any poetry to speak of since ’65 and he never liked teaching worth a damn” (88). If we are to take Violet at her word, the past forty years have been personally unfulfilling for Beverly. The important thing to note about Beverly Weston is that his professional success has defined him, and that self-definition has not changed in the forty or so years since *Meadowlark* was released.

If Beverly is defined by his success, Bob Dravecky is consumed by his failure, constantly living in regret of not becoming a professional golfer (112). He has not accomplished what he set out to achieve, and, as a result, he sees no reason to pursue a new legacy. Taking this comparison into consideration, we might speculate that, had Danny not sought out a legacy in *Blue*, Bob Dravecky’s fate might have resembled Beverly Weston’s.

Marvin’s Room

Scott McPherson’s *Marvin’s Room* presents a unique challenge to the critical apparatus established for the other plays. Lee’s ex-husband, unnamed in the play, has abandoned his family. Butler rhetorically asks if, in a family with a single mother, the father occupies a spectral ‘position’ or ‘place’ that remains unfilled” (*Antigone* 69). Whatever we call the position, the legacy Lee’s ex-husband has left

behind is non-existent, and his son, Hank, desires to assemble a picture of his father for himself. When discussing his father with Bessie, his mother's sister, Hank mentions that his father rode a motorcycle. Bessie then relates the only encounter she had with Hank's father.

BESSIE: It wasn't much of a visit. He was asleep on the couch. Lee didn't want to wake him up, and she had just mopped the kitchen floor so we stood in the hallway and talked for a while. When I left he was still asleep.

HANK: How'd he seem? (37)

Hank's follow-up question demonstrates that he does not regard this story as a disappointment but as a precious nugget that can help him re-construct the hazy image of his father. Hank's attempts to idealize his father already create a distorted picture—before he has even attempted to imitate his father's gender.

In this absence of a legacy, it would stand to reason that Hank's imitation of his father would be a distortion of some kind, and sure enough, it is. Hank poses a disciplinary issue. He has set fire to the house, which lands him to a mental institution. After bickering with his mother for the majority of the play, Hank performs the ultimate imitation of his father: he leaves his mother. As the critical model discussed above suggests, Hank is doomed to endlessly repeat this perverted performance of his absentee father. But then, just as quickly as he left, Hank breaks free of his mimetic performance by doing the one thing his father never did: he comes back. Earlier in the play, Bessie informs Hank that Marvin, his maternal grandfather, had an aptitude for fixing things. Therefore, it is through his *mother's* side of the family that Hank will discover, and perform, his own, new masculinity.

Butler also questions whether, when two men or two women raise a child, one of the parents will assume the roles of Mother and Father (69). McPherson creatively explores this “empirical contingency” without a literal same-sex couple and instead uses two sisters. Essentially, Lee becomes Hank’s “father,” and the nurturing Bessie, suffering from leukemia, becomes his “mother.” Like a mother, Bessie voices her concerns to Lee: “I don’t like you pressuring Hank [to be tested as a possible match for Bessie]”. Lee responds like a frustrated father: “What I’d like to do is take a stick to him” (40). In the absence of a true father, the paternal, disciplinarian role falls to Lee.

Because his mother assumes the “father” role, Hank is no longer compelled to imitate his father. Bessie provides Lee with a new model for running a family, one built on love, and both of them give Hank a new standard for gender performance. Even here, the desire for meaning, or legacy, is satisfied only by the circumstances surrounding Bessie’s impending death due to cancer. Without this motivation, Hank would have remained in a stalled position, searching for a legacy that didn’t exist. Because of the formation of this new family unit, complete with two “parents,” Hank is finally able to achieve the separation necessary to form his own identity.

Marvin’s Room is actually a useful example for explaining how Bob Dravecky brings legacy and meaning to his son without actually dying. If Butler requires some sort of separation, that is achieved in *Marvin’s Room*. Within the play, Scott McPherson portrays how a dismantled family reassembles into

something new. With *Blue*, I wanted to show how a broken family underwent a renewal to become whole again. Instead of a new same-gendered sister parenting couple, Danny merely witnesses his father make the transformation from a disinterested father to a Big Walter type. Instead of substitution, there is domestic conversion. So, for Danny, there is an initial separation (caused by Blue) followed by a rebuilding of the family.

Bob Dravecky

The father figures in each of these antecedents do not change over the course of their respective plays. In *Raisin* and *August*, this can be attributed to the fact that the patriarch is dead for most or all of the play. Similarly, the father in *Marvin* is absent by choice before the play begins. As for Willy, his refusal (or inability) to change is an essential component of *Salesman*. After all, if he had changed his perspective, he wouldn't have killed himself. *Blue* is different in that it portrays a father who begins the play with a certain philosophy and ends with a different one.

During the first act, Bob is mentioned but never seen. Danny informs Kim that Bob supports Danny taking over the family finances because there is something practical to be gained (72). For all intents and purposes, though, Bob Dravecky occupies Judith Butler's "spectral position," essentially leaving Kim as a single mother with two teenage boys. By the end of the first act, he has assumed a phantom-like quality, prompting the audience to ask whether he actually exists.

In creating the character of Bob Dravecky, my goal was to establish his apparent "masculinity." He is tall and brawny, wears flannel, and works in an

unnamed factory. He likely would echo Willy Loman's conviction that "a man who can't handle tools is not a man" (Miller 44).

When Danny experiences his IQ boost, Bob is forced to re-define his view of masculinity and fatherhood. The first time he appears is only to address a dispute between Danny and Kim that has jolted him out of his inconveniently timed sleep. "What's with all the noise?!" he callously shouts. "Some of us have to work around here" (81). Like Lee's ex-husband, he would rather sleep than interact with his own family. But it is during this scene that Bob is finally confronted with the deep arrogance of his son. Accused of having sex with Natalie, Danny lashes out at his interrogators, first Kim and then Bob. Because of his increased intelligence, Danny is no longer subject to Bob's authority. He has the ability, because of improved reflexes, to make his father look downright foolish (84). Like many fathers who have been surpassed by their children, Bob must re-evaluate his role.

Over the course of the second act, Bob makes the transition from passive to active. He goes out of his way (refusing overtime) to be present for the newspaper interview with Aubrey—even in the face of his son's insults about his wardrobe (95).

Finally, when he is confronted by the possibility of his son dying, Bob knows he must assume some degree of responsibility.

DANNY: Dad, didn't you hear the doctor? If I stop cold turkey, it could put me into a rebound effect. I could get really stupid.

BOB: Our actions have consequences--even when we're the victim. You have to face 'em. (113)

The senior Dravecky is likely referring to himself every bit as much as his son. He is well aware that his negligence and lack of legacy have allowed his son to seek out an alternative father figure. All the while, Danny's search for meaning has led to potential death. To overcome the lies and seduction of Mr. Wolf, Bob must confront Danny with the truth, that he is addicted to Blue. "Look at you. You're like some junkie. When I see you like this, it kills me, Danny. It kills my damn heart" (110). As a recovering alcoholic, Bob knows that Danny's recovery will be difficult, and he reassures his son that he will be present and active from this point forward.

Father and Son

What is the bond shared by Danny and Bob? Why is it that Bob can't understand Jake's acting out but when Danny becomes addicted to Blue, Bob's intuition alerts him to a problem? The connection has to do with a similarity in temperament.

Like Danny, Bob favors isolation. Even at the height of his arrogance, Danny just wants to be left alone; similarly, Bob prefers to hide in the bedroom. At one point, Bob mentions how he admires Danny for dealing with his dyslexia, but his desire for solitude could indicate that Bob envies his son for his incapacity to read. Bob, it seems, would prefer blissful ignorance, which is why he remains uninvolved in his family affairs. All he wants is to work and take care of the finances. Easily aggravated, Bob regrets that he has to actually "read" the world at all.

As for Bob's apparent "preference" for Danny, Bob can perceive that Jake is acting out and that Danny is truly in danger. We could also say that while Jake *subversively* attempts to hold a mirror up to Bob's flaws and weakness, Danny, unconsciously and *perversely*, succeeds. The similarity in temperament and the lack of pretense act as a wake-up call for Bob. Danny is living proof that Bob's insufficient legacy is harming his family. While Bob was figuratively asleep at the wheel, Mr. Wolf made his move and supplied Danny with a new, perverse legacy.

One of Blue's most seductive qualities is that it has the power to make one's life *meaningful*. The substance offers the ultimate fulfillment of the need for meaning because it ensures that the subject will at least acquire the means to achieve his deepest desire. Unlike alcohol or drugs, Blue does not offer mere escape, but a road to perfection. When Danny is hospitalized and Mr. Wolf's plans have been thwarted, the guidance counselor makes one last, desperate attempt to bring Danny to his side. He offers him the chance to become a kind of immortal on his alien craft.

Danny is susceptible to Blue for the same reason that Bob secretly clings to the idea of being a professional golfer. In the back of his mind, Bob wishes that he could have both. He desires to live beyond space, where physical limitations don't exist.

Like *Meadowlark* or the idea of being well-liked, these ideas of meaning and perfection all turn inward. An alien world without consequences is every bit as toxic as an unrealized dream of professional golf. They are narcissistic echo chambers

where others are forgotten and the self is isolated. All of these legacies lead to both loneliness and endless cycles of gender performance without the sons ever escaping and becoming their own men.

The Proper Legacy

For Peter Brooks, “all narration is an obituary in that life acquires definable meaning only at, and through, death” (Brooks 1163). What kind of obituaries would be written about any of these patriarchs? If we are to refer to this idea of legacy, then we must understand the concept of a proper legacy. In simplest terms, Walter Lee Younger and Hank live out proper legacies while Willy Loman and Beverly Weston leave their families with insufficient legacies.

In *Marvin’s Room*, Bessie has established a legacy of love, and Hank, in returning, shows his support of this legacy. It would be easy to write off the Youngers as looking out for themselves by moving into a nice neighborhood. However, there is no guarantee that this will be pleasant for them, and Walter insists they are committed to being “good neighbors” (Hansberry 138). The Youngers are willing to make examples of themselves in the fight for justice and equality.

On the other hand, Willy’s philosophy of being “well liked” is self-focused. And we have already established that Beverly’s suicide was motivated by nothing more than personal dissatisfaction. The world did not bring him the happiness he desired (even with the assistance of alcohol), so he dismissed the world.

This would lead us to believe that a proper legacy, one that will help a son break free of the imitative cycle, involves a certain degree of selflessness. This need

not require the son to become a missionary, but if the father is focused only on pleasing himself, the son's performance will simply perpetuate that process. If, on the other hand, the father turns his focus outward, his performance will be more difficult to merely imitate; on the contrary, it can only be continued. This is why the Youngers are the ideal example. Big Walter worked for a better life, but if Walter Lee takes his father's legacy seriously, he must *build* on the work of his father. This means that Walter Lee's goals must be different than his father's, and if Travis, Walter Lee's son, takes his father's gender seriously, he too will build on his father's legacy.

All patriarchs die, but in dying, they can leave their family with a legacy of death or life. Committing suicide, regardless of the circumstances, does not go a long way towards breaking the son's distorted performance of his father's gender. Only by turning his son's focus outside of himself can the father initiate the separation that will help the son become his own man.

Blue

CAST

Danny Dravecky, a high school student

Mr. Alexander Wolf, Danny's guidance counselor

Natalie McGraw, another high school student

Kim Dravecky, Danny's mother

Jake Dravecky, Danny's brother

Bob Dravecky, Danny's father

Aubrey Sanchez, a reporter

A hospital employee, P.A. voice only

SCENE ONE

There is a house set upstage. For the time being, that set remains half-lit. Instead, there is only a

downstage desk with a chair on either side.
ALEXANDER WOLF, a guidance counselor, sits at the desk.

DANNY DRAVECKY, 16, enters from offstage. He is wearing old, worn-out clothes. He needs a shower and a comb. He carries a bookbag.

MR. WOLF

Good morning, Danny.

DANNY

Morning, Mr. Wolf.

MR. WOLF

Sit down.

Danny sits. He sets down his bookbag next to the chair.

MR. WOLF (CONT'D)

So, how are your classes going?

DANNY

They're okay, I guess.

MR. WOLF

Keeping up with your notes?

DANNY

Yeah, I think so.

MR. WOLF

And how's your tutor?

DANNY

She's good. She's helping me.

MR. WOLF

Okay, okay. Any problems?

DANNY

Nope.

MR. WOLF

Danny?

Danny says nothing.

MR. WOLF (CONT'D)

What do you call this?

DANNY

What is it?

MR. WOLF

Your history exam.

Mr. Wolf hands Danny a piece of paper. Danny takes the paper and looks at it.

DANNY

An F?

MR. WOLF

Not just an F, Danny. A forty-five percent.

Danny stares at the floor.

MR. WOLF (CONT'D)

Danny, look at me. You're not in trouble. I'm not the principal.

Danny slowly looks up.

MR. WOLF (CONT'D)

Now, let's talk about what's going on. Are you still doing your exercises?

DANNY

Yes.

MR. WOLF

Are you giving yourself enough time to read at night?

DANNY

Yes.

MR. WOLF

Are you asking questions in class when you don't understand?

DANNY

Yeah!

MR. WOLF

Settle down. This is nothing to be ashamed about.

DANNY

You don't understand, Mr. Wolf.

MR. WOLF

You think I don't understand? My whole life I've been different. I've always watched the human race from afar, never really able to connect with any one person. That's probably why I chose this line of work. I wanted to help people, to find the ones who were different—like me.

DANNY

That's really cool.

MR. WOLF

Well, thank you, Danny. Now, let's get back to you. We haven't talked about your career goals for a while. What would you like to do when you graduate?

DANNY

I don't know. I was thinking I'd like to be a sports agent.

MR. WOLF

An agent? Like Jerry Maguire. "Show me the money!"

DANNY

Who?

MR. WOLF

Never mind. Last time we talked about this, you said you wanted to be a limo driver. Start your own business?

DANNY

Yeah, I don't think so.

MR. WOLF

Now, Danny, I only say this out of concern, but do you really want to get into a career that involves sports? I mean, considering...

Danny says nothing.

MR. WOLF (CONT'D)

Your father?

DANNY

Dad?

MR. WOLF

Yes. I know that he tried to be a pro golfer at one point, right?

DANNY

Yeah, I guess. I just.... I love sports.

MR. WOLF

Do you enjoy playing golf?

DANNY

Yeah, sure.

MR. WOLF

Danny, if you become an agent, there are contracts. For your clients. You'd have to read contracts.

DANNY

I know, Mr. Wolf. I know.

MR. WOLF

So, why not try something else?

DANNY

There is nothing else, Mr. Wolf. I need to get out of this town. I need to make money. And the only thing that pays decent in this poor-ass town is the plant. I'm not working at the plant!

MR. WOLF

Well, Danny your condition makes it—

DANNY

You're supposed to be helping me with my condition. That's your job! You need to figure out how to help me read. You need to help me get my grades up. Help me!

MR. WOLF

Now, Danny. I'm just the guidance counselor. I do the best I can, but my services don't come with a money-back guarantee.

DANNY

Yeah, well. Maybe they should. You stupid people gouge us on our taxes every year.

MR. WOLF

Why would you say that?

DANNY

Because my dad bitches about it. He's a freaking nightmare in April. Can't eat at the kitchen table for a week.

MR. WOLF

He doesn't do his taxes online?

DANNY

What? No.

MR. WOLF

Sorry. Let's get back to your studies. I only ask this because I'm trying to find the best possible solution for you. Do you think you might need a different tutor?

DANNY

No way.

MR. WOLF

Don't be so quick to refuse. You two have been friends for a long time. I understand that you have a rapport, but maybe you need someone with less bias.

DANNY

No. Natalie's a good tutor. She really helps me.

MR. WOLF

I know she's very intelligent, and she's also very patient. How long have you two been friends?

DANNY

Since grade school. Like, fourth grade or something.

MR. WOLF

That's quite a long time. Are you two involved?

DANNY

What?

MR. WOLF

Well, you seem to be very close. Are you romantically involved?

DANNY

Romantically involved? What is this, *Entertainment Tonight*?

MR. WOLF

Just answer the question: is there a physical aspect to your relationship?

DANNY

No. Okay?

MR. WOLF

All right. I just had to ask.

DANNY

Were you gonna give me the safe sex speech if I said "Yes"?

Mr. Wolf laughs.

MR. WOLF

Yep, probably. Why, did you mean to say "Yes"?

DANNY

No, no. Please God, no.

MR. WOLF

Okay, 'cause I got a pamphlet in the drawer to go with that speech.

DANNY

Yeah, I'll bet.

MR. WOLF

Danny, how long has it been since you took an IQ test?

DANNY

I don't know. A few years.

MR. WOLF

And what was your score on that?

DANNY

I don't remember. Ninety-something?

MR. WOLF

That sounds about right. I'll have to check. Did you have any help?

DANNY

You mean, did I cheat?

MR. WOLF

That's not what I meant. Did you have a reader?

DANNY

Oh, yeah.

MR. WOLF

I'll tell you what I'm going to do, Danny. I'm going to set you up with an official IQ test and a reader to help you. In case you're wondering, it can't be Natalie.

DANNY

Right.

MR. WOLF

Excellent! Come by my office tomorrow during study hall, and I'll give you the test. Sound good?

DANNY

Umm, I guess.

MR. WOLF

What's wrong?

DANNY

Nothing, it's just... Why do you want me to take this test?

MR. WOLF

Because, as your counselor, I need a very accurate picture of just how intelligent you are. And I don't think I have that yet.

DANNY

Do I have to ask my parents?

MR. WOLF

Of course. Tell them to call me if they have any questions.

DANNY

I mean, do I need their permission?

MR. WOLF

I suppose. Is that a problem?

DANNY

I don't know. Maybe.

MR. WOLF

Danny, I know your parents have their issues, but surely they'd let you take a simple IQ test.

DANNY

Yeah, I guess. I just, I want them to be proud of me.

MR. WOLF

Do you believe they love you?

DANNY

Yeah, I mean, I think so.

Mr. Wolf gets up from the desk and turns his back to Danny.

MR. WOLF

Do you love your parents?

DANNY

Yeah. I do.

MR. WOLF

Do you feel they neglect you?

DANNY

No, well, maybe. They're just busy.

MR. WOLF

How important is it to you that you leave this town?

DANNY

Really important.

MR. WOLF

What are you willing to do?

DANNY

I'll do anything, Mr. Wolf. I'll do extra credit, I'll take summer school. I just need to get out of here.

Mr. Wolf lets out a sigh of frustration.

DANNY (CONT'D)

Mr. Wolf?

MR. WOLF

Danny.

He turns around to face Danny, now smiling.

MR. WOLF (CONT'D)

I believe you could do very well on the IQ test.

DANNY

Really?

MR. WOLF

Yes. I just think you need to prepare properly. So, tonight, I want you to get a good night's sleep, eat breakfast, and let's see.... Oh, I guess you could try this.

He reaches into the drawer of his desk and produces two clear water bottles filled with BLUE JUICE.

DANNY

What is it?

MR. WOLF

Oh, it's just some juice.

DANNY

Where'd you get it? The store?

MR. WOLF

No. I made it myself. There's a fruit tree in my yard. I just make the juice.

DANNY

What's it do?

MR. WOLF

Probably nothing. But studies have shown that it can help brain function. And hey, it's better than caffeine, right?

DANNY

Okay, let me try it.

MR. WOLF

Mmmm, not right now. You'd better wait until right before the IQ test.

DANNY

That's weird. How am I supposed to know if I like it?

MR. WOLF

You could smell it.

DANNY

Okay.

He opens a bottle and smells the juice.

DANNY (CONT'D)

That's different. What is it?

MR. WOLF

It's... ummm... papaya!

DANNY

Huh, I didn't know papayas were blue.

MR. WOLF

Usually, they're not. It's a unique species. Comes from... the Middle East.

DANNY

Cool. Thanks.

MR. WOLF

Remember, wait until tonight to drink it. And just drink one bottle.

Danny puts the bottles in his bag.

DANNY

I'll wait. Thank you, Mr. Wolf. For everything.

MR. WOLF

You're very welcome, Danny.

Danny exits. Mr. Wolf slowly sits back in his chair, putting his fingertips together.

MR. WOLF (CONT'D)

Now, we'll see...

SCENE TWO

The upstage house set is now fully illuminated. There is a living room at stage right with a couch, recliner, coffee table and a TV downstage. At far stage right is the front door. Directly upstage of this door is a staircase that goes up a half-level to Danny's bedroom, which consists of a bed and a night stand. In the center of the upstage wall is a hallway that leads back to the parents' bedroom. There is also a kitchen at stage right with a refrigerator, table, sink, and cupboards.

Danny's mother, KIM, sits on the living room couch with a consumer brace on her leg. Crutches lie on the floor between the couch and the coffee table. Danny enters through the front door.

DANNY

Hey.

KIM

Hi, sweetie. Hey, get me my *TV Guide*.

Danny picks up a TV guide off the table next to the door.

DANNY

I don't know why you still get this thing. We have TiVo.

KIM

You can't hold TiVo and flip through the pages.

DANNY

If you say so.

He drops his bag and plops on the other side of the couch.

DANNY (CONT'D)

Dad home?

KIM

No, he's pulling a double.

DANNY

Oh, right. Where's Jake?

KIM

Hell if I know.

DANNY

He's not with those guys, is he?

KIM

I said I don't know.

She opens the *TV Guide*.

KIM (CONT'D)

You wanna help me with the crossword?

DANNY

I don't know. (Motioning to the TV) It looks like you're busy.

Kim picks up the remote and turns the TV off. She puts the remote on the coffee table and picks up a pencil.

KIM

There. Now, let's go.

DANNY

Okay, fine.

KIM

So, one across. Six letters. "Ibsen play. Enemy of the blank."

DANNY

State?

KIM

Nope. That's five letters.

DANNY

I don't know. What's one down?

KIM

Let's see. Oh, you'll like this one. "Golfer Jesper blank."

DANNY

Parnevik.

KIM

See? I knew you'd get that one. How do you spell Parne....

DANNY

Parnevik. Let's see, uhhhh. P-A-R-N.... Ummm, I? I don't know. Dammit. I can say his name, but I just can't see it in my head.

KIM

Okay, okay. Two down. Five letters. "Show me the..."

DANNY AND KIM

Money.

KIM

Hey, when did you see that movie?

DANNY

Never. Someone just said that at school today.

KIM

Oh, yeah? How was school?

DANNY

It was alright.

KIM

What?

DANNY

What do you mean "What"?

KIM

Something's up with you. I can tell.

DANNY

Nothing. It's just... Fine. Mr. Wolf wants me to take an IQ test.

KIM

Oh, no. What did you do now, Danny?

DANNY

Nothing.

KIM

What?

DANNY

I may have gotten a grade on my history test that was less than perfect.

KIM

How much less?

DANNY

It was an F. I'm sorry, okay?

KIM

Awww, Danny. That's just great. After all that time you spend with Natalie.

DANNY

I know, Mom.

KIM

What have you two been doing anyway?

DANNY

Aaaargh! Why does everyone think that me and Natalie are having sex or something?

KIM

Sex? Why? Who else said that?

DANNY

Mr. Wolf.

KIM

Who's Mr. Wolf again?

DANNY

My guidance counselor. The one who wants me to take the IQ test. God, why don't you listen to me?

KIM

I listen to you, honey. I'm just really tired, and I'm in a lot of pain.

Danny gets up.

KIM (CONT'D)

Where are you going?

DANNY

I'm going to my room.

He gets up and starts to walk towards the staircase.

KIM

Wait, wait, wait. Get me my meds.

DANNY

Okay.

He walks back to the coffee table and picks up a prescription bottle.

KIM

Thanks, baby. I'd get them myself, but I'm injured. Again.

DANNY

You sprained your ankle. Again.

He gives her the bottle.

DANNY (CONT'D)

Try not to finish it in one day. Please.

KIM

Don't you worry about me. I'll be fine.

DANNY

Well, someone has to worry about you. Dad works all the time, and God knows Jake doesn't care.

KIM

That's enough of that. You never gave him a chance.

DANNY

I've given him plenty. I'm going to my room. Anything else?

KIM

Kiss?

She puckers up. Danny walks back and kisses her on the cheek.

KIM (CONT'D)

I love you, sweetie.

DANNY

I love you, too.

JAKE DRAVECKY, 18, enters through the front door. He wears a football jersey and a backwards baseball cap.

DANNY

Hey, look who's here.

KIM

Hey, baby.

JAKE

Hi, Mom. Hey, Danny.

Where were you, Jakey?
KIM

School, Mom.
JAKE

Really? I didn't see you.
DANNY

It's a big school.
JAKE

Bullshit.
DANNY

Boys, not today. I'm in a a very bad place. Please, no fighting.
KIM

Fine.
DANNY

He walks back to the door and picks up his bag.

You're leaving?
KIM

Well, you said no fighting. And this is how I don't fight.
DANNY

He picks up his bag, walks to the front door and opens it.

Where are you going?
KIM

I don't know. The park. Or maybe Nat's.
DANNY

He starts to close the door behind him, then stops and opens it again.

Where I will not have sex. (to Jake) Good to see you, bro.

Man, what is with the attitude?
JAKE

Screw it.

DANNY

Danny exits through the front door and walks downstage.

So, what's for dinner?

JAKE

The lights fade down on the house set, leaving only Danny downstage. He takes the bottle of blue juice out of his bag. He opens the bottle and puts it up to his mouth. He takes a sip, makes a face showing that he likes it, then drinks the whole bottle.

LIGHTS OUT.

SCENE THREE

Danny and NATALIE MCTEAGUE, 17, sit on a downstage bench. She is dressed plainly, in jeans and a girl's "Green Eggs and Ham" t-shirt. They are eating lunch. Natalie is eating sushi, while Danny is eating Cheeto's and a Little Debbie.

Danny's hair is combed, and his clothes aren't as shabby as before.

How are your classes?

NATALIE

Okay.

DANNY

Have you met with Mr. Wolf at all?

NATALIE

No, not since Monday.

DANNY

When he showed you the history test?

NATALIE

Yeah.

DANNY

NATALIE

What's wrong?

DANNY

Nothing. I just don't want to talk about the stupid history test.

NATALIE

Okay.

DANNY

Uggh. How can you eat that crap?

NATALIE

I'll have you know that this is fresh and organic. You're the one eating garbage.

DANNY

Whatever. This is good, wholesome, American food. Yours looks like something I'd find on the rocks at the beach.

NATALIE

Shut up.

DANNY

You might as well look up and catch seagull shit in your mouth. I mean, they do eat fish, right?

Natalie grimaces in disgust, but she also laughs a little.

NATALIE

You're so gross.

DANNY

Whatever. You love me and you don't even know it.

NATALIE

That's true. I do love you.

DANNY

Really?

NATALIE

As a friend.

DANNY

Not more?

NATALIE

I can never tell if you're pretending to have a crush on me, or if it's really true.

DANNY

Maybe I can't, either.

Natalie turns to the homework.

NATALIE

Okay, I think it was the percentages that were confusing you. Let's do this one. Boron. Now, boron has two isotopes. The ten-five isotope has an atomic mass of 10.01 and the eleven-five isotope-

DANNY

The answer is 10.81. If you round down.

NATALIE

What? Yeah. I thought you said you were having trouble.

DANNY

Yeah, I was.

NATALIE

Well, why am I helping you?

DANNY

Oh, well, I figured out those problems last night. But we were supposed to have lunch today. So, I just thought that we could eat together.

NATALIE

Why would you do that? We see each other every day.

DANNY

I don't know. I just wanted to have a peaceful lunch with a friend. My family's driving me crazy.

NATALIE

Yeah. How's your mom doing?

DANNY

She's okay. The doctor is keeping her dosage the same.

NATALIE

Should she be doing that?

DANNY

I don't know. Anything's better than going cold turkey. She was crazy last year.

NATALIE

Yeah, that was bad.

DANNY

I don't know if I told you this, but one time, my dad comes home from work, and he's crabby as hell, and he says to my mom, "Where's my dinner?" And she throws this bowl of fake fruit at him.

NATALIE

I've never seen that.

DANNY

Seen what?

NATALIE

The bowl of fake fruit.

DANNY

Oh, yeah. We keep it in the closet. She only puts it out for company.

NATALIE

And I'm not company?

DANNY

Come on, you're different. You're... Natalie. Polite, intelligent, perfect Natalie.

NATALIE

Yeah, right.

DANNY

I'm serious. You know everyone loves you. Even my dad. That's gotta say something that Bob Dravecky likes one of my friends.

NATALIE

Yeah, that's true.

DANNY

You coming over later?

NATALIE

Sure. You still want help with your homework?

DANNY

Yeah, I gotta get my grades up, and I can't handle my family alone.

NATALIE

You should get ready for your IQ test.

DANNY

Oh, that? Yeah, I already took it.

NATALIE

Are you serious? Why didn't you tell me?

DANNY

Yeah, that was the other reason I wanted to have lunch. I wanted to tell someone who appreciated it.

NATALIE

Oh, it must be good, then. Come on, out with it.

DANNY

Well, I don't know what I got, but I feel like I did really well.

NATALIE

Really?

DANNY

Yeah, it was weird. I've never felt like that during a test. Then, I had a chemistry test after the IQ test, and I think that went well, too.

NATALIE

Good for you.

DANNY

What did you get?

NATALIE

Oh, Danny, don't worry about that.

DANNY

Come on, what did you get?

NATALIE

I got a 141. But that was last year. I mean, you shouldn't worry about my score.

DANNY

No, I won't.

NATALIE

Then, what's the problem?

DANNY

I don't know. I guess it's hard on the self esteem when your best friend is gonna be the valedictorian.

NATALIE

Hey, why are you thinking about all this stuff? Is it the history test?

DANNY

Huh? Oh, yeah. The history test.

NATALIE

Listen, that history test must have been really hard.

DANNY

What do you mean?

NATALIE

Well, if you got an F on a history test, and then in the same week, you do well on an IQ test... (She pauses.)

DANNY

What?

NATALIE

Well, either you got a lot smarter in a matter of days, or that history exam was ridiculously hard.

DANNY

Right. That would make sense.

NATALIE

Exactly. I mean, what other explanation is there?

DANNY

None, I guess.

NATALIE

Don't worry about it. You did great on your IQ test. That should make you feel pretty excited about the ACTs, then.

DANNY

The ACTs. I forgot about that.

NATALIE

I didn't. I want to kick that test's ass.

DANNY

You will.

NATALIE

Well, now it looks like you will, too. Sushi?

DANNY

Get that crap out of my face.

NATALIE

But it's so yummy.

She puts a piece of sushi on her fork and moves it around in front of his face.

NATALIE

Yummy, yummy sushi.

DANNY

(smiling) Knock it off.

NATALIE

You love me and you don't even know it.

DANNY

Yes, I do.

NATALIE

Knock it off. I was just playing around.

DANNY

I wasn't.

SCENE FOUR

Danny's house. Kim sits on the couch with her TV Guide. Danny and Natalie enter through the front door.

KIM

Hey, you guys.

NATALIE

Hi, Mrs. Dravecky.

KIM

How many times do I gotta tell you? It's Kim to you.

NATALIE

Sorry, Mrs. Dravecky. Force of habit.

KIM

Hello, Danny.

DANNY

Hi, Mom.

Kim opens up her TV Guide and grabs a pencil off the coffee table.

KIM

Does Randy Jackson spell his name with a Y or an I?

DANNY

What?

KIM

It's the first crossword question. "Youngest Jackson," five letters.

DANNY

Janet.

KIM

What?

DANNY

The youngest Jackson is Janet.

KIM

I thought it was Randy. He seems pretty young on *American Idol*.

DANNY

That's a different Randy Jackson.

KIM

Really? Huh. (filling in the crossword). Alright, "Janet" fits. How did you know that?

DANNY

I saw something online last year.

NATALIE

And you remember it?

DANNY

Yeah. So?

KIM

Alright. I'm going to get you here. Let's go for a hard one. Twenty-three across. Eleven letters.

DANNY

Okay...

KIM

"Super Croc. Discovered by Paul Sereno."

DANNY

Sarcosuchus.

KIM

This is crazy. When did you learn all this stuff?

DANNY

I saw a little blurb about it in *USA Today*.

NATALIE

Since when do you read *USA Today*?

DANNY

I don't. I just saw it in a newsstand.

KIM

When?

DANNY

A few years ago.

KIM

Well, you should, like, go on *Jeopardy* or something.

DANNY

I got two questions right. Doesn't mean anything.

KIM

Don't sell yourself short.

NATALIE

Yeah, he thinks he did well on two tests yesterday.

KIM

Really? I thought you did bad on a test.

DANNY

That was on Monday.

KIM

So, what changed?

DANNY

Nothing. I'm just trying really hard.

KIM

Why now?

DANNY

I don't know.

NATALIE

Well, some of the colleges Danny's looking at are pretty strict about GPA.

KIM

What kind of colleges?

NATALIE

Well, colleges that offer degrees in sports and entertainment law.

KIM

Sports and entertainment law? You want to be a lawyer?

DANNY

No. I want to be a sports agent.

KIM

An agent?

DANNY

I don't know. Maybe.

KIM

Danny, I'm glad you're doing better, but when it comes to colleges, you need to take what you can get.

DANNY

You know what? I was really excited because I had all kinds of stuff I wanted to show you, but now, never mind.

NATALIE

No, wait, Danny. Come on. Tell her.

DANNY

Oooh, are you *his* agent now?

NATALIE

Come on, Kim. Let him talk.

KIM

Alright, sweetie. Whatcha got?

DANNY

Well, umm first, what's the interest rate on the mortgage here?

KIM

What?

DANNY

I mean, is it adjustable rate or fixed?

KIM

You shouldn't be worrying about this. Let me and your dad take care of this.

DANNY

I'm just trying to help.

KIM

Anything else?

DANNY

Can I look at yours and Dad's earning statements?

KIM

Why?

DANNY

I think I wanna do the taxes.

KIM

Well, you'll have to wait. I'll have to go get our files from the secret spot.

DANNY

The file cabinet is in the basement inside the old dehumidifier, and the key's in Dad's old golf trophy.

KIM

How do you know all this?

DANNY

It's easy. I see you go into the basement every year when taxes are due, and Dad loves that stupid trophy so much, he'd think it was a great hiding place. (dad's voice) "No one would ever think to hide anything in there."

KIM

I don't know. Your dad usually deals with that kind of stuff. I guess you can go look at it. Just for fun.

DANNY

This isn't fun, Mom. This is important.

KIM

Why are you so interested in our money?

DANNY

Because you need to be more responsible!

NATALIE

I think what Danny is saying is that there's always room for improvement.

KIM

Sounds like he thinks he's the parent now. What, you get a good grade on a quiz and you're ready to run the house?

DANNY

I don't know. I guess we'll see.

Kim picks up her crutches and uses them to help her stand up.

KIM

Well, good luck bringing all this up with your dad.

She starts to walk with her crutches toward the back hallway.

DANNY

Wait. There was one more thing.

Kim stops and turns around with her crutches.

KIM

Okay...

DANNY

Now, I mean this with all good intentions, but I was looking online, and I found you some pain treatment regimens. Here, I even printed on paper. Just for you. You should bring it up with your doctor.

He pulls some papers out of his bookbag.

DANNY

Here ya go. Paper.

He puts the papers on the coffee table. Kim takes the papers and looks at them.

KIM

Pain treatment? Dr. Clark said that kind of stuff wouldn't work.

DANNY

Well, then maybe you need a new doctor. I printed a list of other options.

KIM

Where is all this coming from?

DANNY

Nowhere. I just don't want you to be on these painkillers anymore.

KIM

Well, look at you, Mr. Big Shot. Finally caring about your mother. Where've you been all this time?

She exits into the back hallway.

DANNY

That went well.

NATALIE

You did your best.

DANNY

I tried. Why are people so hard to deal with?

NATALIE

Even me?

DANNY

No, not you. Never you.

She hugs him. He hugs her back. Then he pulls back.

DANNY (CONT'D)

Go out with me.

NATALIE

What?

DANNY

Dammit! That sounded really old fashioned. I just, I wanna be with you.

NATALIE

Are you serious?

DANNY

Yes. I am. No jokes. Let's make it official. Do you want to go out with me?

NATALIE

(smiling) Mmmmm, maybe.

DANNY

Is that a yes?

NATALIE

It's not a no.

She walks toward the front door and opens it, then looks back.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Call me later, and see if I say "Yes".

DANNY

It's a deal.

NATALIE

Good luck with your parents.

Jake enters through the front door just as Natalie is exiting.

JAKE

Nat! Long time, no see.

NATALIE

Hey, Jake. Where've you been?

JAKE

Oh, here and there.

NATALIE

Some things never change.

She walks past Jake.

JAKE

Hey don't you wanna hear about my latest adventures?

NATALIE

No, I'm good. I got my own adventure to get ready for.

JAKE

You're the only one I know who thinks the ACTs are an adventure.

NATALIE

(smiling at Danny) Yep, that's me.

She exits.

JAKE

What's with her?

DANNY

I don't know. Women, right? So, where have you been?

JAKE

Sleeping on Snowie's couch mostly.

DANNY

Seriously? That's your latest adventure?

JAKE

Come on, you used to be excited to hear about where I've been.

DANNY

I was thirteen. And that was when you were living on the streets of Milwaukee.

JAKE

I guess you're tougher to impress as you get older.

DANNY

Or maybe you're just not that impressive.

The two sit in silence.

JAKE

Well, I think it's time for a nightcap.

He gets up and walks to the kitchen.

DANNY

Are you serious? Dad'll be pissed. Again.

JAKE

What he doesn't know won't hurt me.

DANNY

Fine. Get hammered. I'm staying in here.

Jake reaches the top of the cupboard and pulls down a bottle of vodka.

JAKE

Okay, Mr. Goody Two-Shoes.

Jake takes a glass from the cupboard.

DANNY

Whatever. You're Mom's favorite. She still calls you Jakey.

JAKE

Yeah, but Dad hates me. So, if you score it, *you* actually come out ahead.

DANNY

Dad only hates you 'cause you crashed his car. He didn't care about anything else. It was the car that pushed him over the edge.

JAKE

What can I say? I was fifteen. I thought a learner's permit was sufficient.

Jake opens the refrigerator and starts looking for orange juice.

DANNY

You guessed wrong. And now, because you were an idiot, I don't get a car. I gotta walk.

JAKE

I see, it must be hard to walk to the half mile to school. Or is it the two blocks to Nat's?

DANNY

Shut your face.

JAKE

Seriously. Everyone wants to know what's going on there?

Danny starts to speak, and then stops himself.

DANNY

You know what? I always let you piss me off, and then we fight, and nothing changes. So, I'm not gonna bother.

Jake takes a bottle of Blue from the refrigerator and pours it into his glass.

JAKE

Good for you, little bro. You're growing up.

Jake adds the vodka and stirs with a spoon.

DANNY

Besides, Natalie and I are going out.

Jake stops stirring and comes back into the living room.

JAKE

What?

DANNY

I thought you'd like that.

JAKE

Come on, little bro. Details, details.

DANNY

There are no details. We're just going out.

JAKE

Did you guys make out? Did you screw her?

DANNY

No!

JAKE

Come on, she's the tutor, you've been a bad boy... I know how it goes.

Jake goes back into the kitchen to get his glass.

DANNY

Yeah, you really don't.

JAKE

Finally! I'm glad that's over with.

He comes out from the kitchen with a glass of Blue and vodka.

DANNY

What the hell is that?

JAKE

What?

DANNY

That. What are you drinking?

JAKE

Oh, well, I wanted to make a screwdriver, but we didn't have any orange juice. So, I made this. I call it a "Blue-driver."

Danny looks in the kitchen and sees an empty bottle for Blue.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Yeah, I didn't know what that was. I thought it might be for Dad, like prune juice or something. But I took a sip, and it tastes pretty good.

DANNY

You idiot. That was for my me.

JAKE

Well, share. Spread the wealth.

DANNY
You half-wit. I need that.

JAKE
Why?

DANNY
None of your business. Just give me the glass.

JAKE
No, it's useless to you now. There's alcohol in it.

DANNY
I need it.

JAKE
Well, you can't have it.

Danny reaches for the drink again. Jake holds the glass above his head.

DANNY
Give it to me.

JAKE
No!

Danny lunges for the glass, but Jake pushes him down to the floor.

JAKE (CONT'D)
I'll tell you what. I'll give it to you if you promise to drink it.

Danny stands up.

DANNY
There's vodka in there.

JAKE
Yep. I guess you're just gonna have to be a lush like me.

Danny pauses, then takes the glass and drinks it.

JAKE (CONT'D)
How does it taste?

DANNY

Like crap. How can you drink that?

JAKE

Practice.

Danny dumps the rest of the drink into the sink.

JAKE

Hey!

Kim comes out of her bedroom on her crutches.

KIM

What is with all the noise?

JAKE

Mom, Danny's drinking alcohol.

KIM

What?

DANNY

Mom, he's being crazy. He drank it.

KIM

Jake, no drinking, honey. Why do you have liquor in the house, anyway? You know that's not good for your father.

JAKE

Wait, what? Mom, I'm telling the truth. Danny drank it.

KIM

Jakey, Danny doesn't drink.

JAKE

But he did! I swear. I'd tell you if I drank it. I wanted to try it. It's not fair. He gets to try everything. God!

DANNY

I have dyslexia, you idiot.

JAKE

See? You get dyslexia? Where's my politically correct learning disability?

DANNY

You want my life, Jake? 'Cause you can have it.

JAKE

Okay, whatever. Freak.

Jake walks toward the front door.

KIM

Where are you going, Jakey?

JAKE

I don't know. I think I'll go crash at Snowie's.

KIM

Oh. Well, be safe.

Jake exits through the door.

DANNY

Why do you always give him a free pass? I don't mind you having favorites, but could you be less obvious about it?

KIM

I... I don't have favorites.

DANNY

Very convincing. I'm going to my room.

KIM

Wait. What is this juice?

DANNY

It's just some juice.

KIM

You're drinking this now?

DANNY

Yeah.

KIM

I thought this was your father's. You know, to help keep him regular.

DANNY

And on that note... Good night.

Danny goes up the stairs to his room and lays in bed.

SCENE FIVE

Mr. Wolf sits at his desk, working. Danny rushes in and throws a piece of paper on the desk.

DANNY

Eighty-nine! Eighty-nine?!

MR. WOLF

What are you talking about?

DANNY

I took your stupid IQ test. I slept, I ate breakfast, I even drank that stupid blue juice, which, frankly, just tastes weird.

MR. WOLF

Frankly? That's not a usual word for you.

DANNY

What?

MR. WOLF

Just making an observation. So, you're disappointed.

DANNY

Duh! I'm pissed off. You really are something. You get me thinking that I'm special, that I have hidden potential. Turns out I'm just another underachiever. I'll take my refund back now.

MR. WOLF

Danny, I'm sorry. I don't know what to say.

DANNY

What's in that juice, anyway? It made my throat itch. During the test, I kept making that clicking sound with my uvula. The monitor thought that the reader and I were cheating.

MR. WOLF

Likely side effect. I should have guessed.

DANNY

What are you talking about? Do you know something?

MR. WOLF

I merely know that the blue juice I gave you has been shown to help people with learning disabilities.

DANNY

Says who? Later that night, I did some reading on your blue juice. Turns out, there are no studies on it. I Googled all kinds of stuff: "blue juice," "blue papaya," "blue papaya juice". They all came up empty.

MR. WOLF

You did some reading?

DANNY

Yeah, so?

MR. WOLF

Think about that statement. You did some reading.

DANNY

Wait. You're right.

MR. WOLF

How often have you done research like that?

DANNY

Well, never. I could never read that much.

MR. WOLF

So, something must have been different.

DANNY

Yeah.

MR. WOLF

Are you doing more research?

DANNY

No, I... I have trouble reading again.

MR. WOLF

How did you feel when you were taking the test?

DANNY

I, I don't know.

MR. WOLF

Think. Remember.

DANNY

I felt good, okay? I felt... confident.

MR. WOLF

Did you take another test that day?

DANNY

Yeah, in my chemistry class.

MR. WOLF

And how did you feel for that one?

DANNY

I don't know. About the same, I guess.

Mr. Wolf hands Danny a sheet of paper.

DANNY

What's this?

MR. WOLF

Your chemistry test.

Danny looks at it.

DANNY

Is this right?

MR. WOLF

Yes.

DANNY

I got an A?! I got an A on a test?

MR. WOLF

Apparently.

DANNY

This is great! Wait, what does it mean?

MR. WOLF

It means you have true potential. Just as I thought.

DANNY

Yeah, but then what happened on the IQ test?

MR. WOLF

Oh, I suspect my timing was off. I forget how slow your metabolism is—even for an adolescent.

DANNY

The timing for what?

MR. WOLF

You haven't drank it again, have you?

DANNY

Drank what? The juice?

MR. WOLF

Yes, the juice.

DANNY

So, it *was* the juice that made me smart?

MR. WOLF

Danny, it didn't "make" you smart; it unlocked your true potential. It's been a few days now, but you're still using words like "frankly"—not typical for your vocabulary.

DANNY

Okay...

MR. WOLF

My point is that you need a more consistent... dosage. You have the ability to be something great, and I want to help you get there.

DANNY

You're gonna give me more juice?

MR. WOLF

Yes, I am. Now, I want you to be very cautious about how much you drink.

DANNY

Okay.

MR. WOLF

Drink one bottle a day. If you have a test, you should drink it about twelve hours before. That seems to be how long it takes.

DANNY

Why does it take so long?

MR. WOLF

I'm not sure. I'll try to figure that out.

DANNY

Can't you just ask someone?

MR. WOLF

Well, this kind of juice is very... unique. Not many people know about it yet.

DANNY

That's what I thought.

MR. WOLF

Also, I want you to meet with me every day. Instead of study hall, you come here. I'll give you your bottle, and we can talk about how you're feeling.

DANNY

Okay. Is this, like, a secret?

MR. WOLF

Well, the FDA hasn't officially recognized the fruit that this juice comes from, but rest assured: it's completely natural.

DANNY

Where did you get it?

MR. WOLF

The fruit grows on a tree on my property.

DANNY

Really? That's cool. So, you make the juice yourself?

MR. WOLF

Yes. I do.

DANNY

That'd be nice. Make your own juice whenever you want.

MR. WOLF

It is.

DANNY

I knew there was something about this juice. I'm glad I didn't let my brother drink the other bottle.

MR. WOLF

Your brother tried to drink the other bottle?

DANNY

Yeah, he mixed it with vodka.

MR. WOLF

How did you stop him?

DANNY

I poured it down the sink.

MR. WOLF

Good, good. That's good. You probably shouldn't mix it with alcohol.

DANNY

Why not?

MR. WOLF

Just to be safe.

DANNY

Oh.

MR. WOLF

Listen, you should get to class. Don't forget your juice.

DANNY

Okay. Hey, thanks, Mr. Wolf.

MR. WOLF

You're welcome, Danny.

SCENE SIX

An Italian restaurant. Danny and Natalie sit at a table downstage of the living room set. Danny is wearing a suit and tie. Natalie is wearing a woman's dress shirt and jeans.

DANNY

You like the table?

NATALIE

It's great.

DANNY

We can move if you like.

NATALIE

No, it's great.

DANNY

I thought so. Because as a general rule, you like the temperature a little cooler. I'm guessing your ideal temperature is somewhere around 68.5. Give or take. Whereas my preferred room temperature is a little closer to the average. Which is 72.3.

NATALIE

And that played a role in the table selection?

DANNY

Ideally, I would've picked that table right over there, but it's taken.

NATALIE

Why?

DANNY

Because the temperature is cooler, and because there's a gazebo outside. I know you said you liked gazebos once.

NATALIE

Like five years ago. And I'm not sure I've talked about it since.

DANNY

Really? Doesn't seem that long ago.

NATALIE

What are you going to order?

DANNY

I don't know. Maybe the shrimp and crab cannelloni. How about you?

NATALIE

I'll get the rigatoni alla toscana.

DANNY

That sounds good. Nice and safe.

NATALIE

Shut up. Not all of us are going through a quarter-life crisis.

DANNY

I'm not having a crisis.

NATALIE

Oh, please. Look at all these changes. You're talking about college. You're thinking about money. And the shrimp and crab cannelloni? You hate seafood.

DANNY

Not anymore. I feel like my palate's becoming more sophisticated.

Natalie puts her hands by her face and makes crab pincers.

NATALIE

(little crab voice) No, Danny. Pwease don't let your pawate become more sophisticated.

DANNY

What are you doing?

NATALIE

Pwease don't eat me, Danny. I'm just a wittle crab.

DANNY

(smiling) Come on. We're on a date.

NATALIE

Oh, no, Danny. Not a date.

She reaches across the table and pinches him with her hand.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Not me, Danny. Order something else.

Danny chuckles.

DANNY

You're crazy, do you know that?

NATALIE

(in her normal voice) Hey, there it is.

DANNY

What?

NATALIE

I haven't seen you laugh in a long time.

DANNY

I laugh.

NATALIE

No, you smile. It's not the same. And it's a fake smile.

DANNY

I've never been happier.

NATALIE

Really?

DANNY

Of course. You have no idea how long I've waited for this.

NATALIE

Well, then, why did you wait so long?

DANNY

Because I didn't think you thought of me that way.

Natalie sips her water.

DANNY (CONT'D)

Your silence is very reassuring.

NATALIE

Sorry, I just—

DANNY

Didn't think of me that way. Let me ask you something, Miss McGraw. What changed your mind about me?

NATALIE

Well, lately, you've been... different.

DANNY

How?

NATALIE

I don't know. It's hard to pinpoint it. Look, can we talk about something else now? This is making me uncomfortable.

DANNY

Of course, we can talk about whatever you want. I'm different now. I can keep up with you.

NATALIE

Keep up?

DANNY

For example, art. Did you know that later in his life, Dali focused on Christian subjects? And he shifted toward more classical compositions.

NATALIE

Umm, I don't think so.

DANNY

And at the same time, this was in the early fifties, he was also interested in the Hiroshima bombings. He called that period of his work "Nuclear Mysticism."

NATALIE

Hey, did you finally watch the first Harry Potter movie?

DANNY

Yeah, it was fine. But back to Dali. One of the paintings he made, the Sacrament of the Last Supper, has a very classical composition. Have you seen it? I saw a reproduction of it at the library. Just beautiful. Anyway, he composed it using the golden ratio, which is-

NATALIE

$A + \frac{B}{A}$ is equal to $\frac{A}{B}$.

DANNY

Yeah. Well done.

NATALIE

I'm in calculus. I can comprehend the golden ratio.

DANNY

No, I'm sure you can. I mean, you're brilliant.

NATALIE

Why are you talking about art now?

DANNY

I'm sorry, I thought that's what you liked to talk about.

NATALIE

When have I ever talked about art?

DANNY

Well, not art, per se, but you always like to talk about important things.

NATALIE

What do you mean, "important"?

DANNY

You know, culture, politics, classical music.

NATALIE

You make me sound like a snob.

DANNY

No, I wouldn't love you if you were a snob, but I'm just saying that I've always felt behind when I'm talking with you. Now, we don't have such a gap.

NATALIE

What are you talking about?

DANNY

You're upset.

NATALIE

Yeah, I thought it was Danny Dravecky that asked me out. Was I wrong?

DANNY

No, Nat. It's still me. It's just a better me.

NATALIE

Clearly.

DANNY

Sarcasm noted. We can talk about Harry Potter, if you like. I'm up to the second book now.

NATALIE

Book?

DANNY

Yeah. The book.

NATALIE

What about your dyslexia?

DANNY

I don't know. It must be clearing up.

NATALIE

Dyslexia doesn't just clear up. It's something you have your whole life.

DANNY

Well, then I'm just adjusting.

NATALIE

How?

DANNY

Have you given any thought about dessert?

NATALIE

What?

DANNY

They have soufflé here. Does that sound good?

NATALIE

Yeah, sure.

DANNY

Excellent. I'm having a great time.

SCENE SEVEN

Danny's house. Kim sits on the couch. She is no longer wearing her brace, and she is flexing her ankle.

Danny and Natalie enter.

KIM

Hey, you two.

DANNY

Hey.

NATALIE

Hi, Kim.

KIM

How was dinner?

DANNY

I don't know. Why don't you ask Natalie?

NATALIE

It was fine.

KIM

Can I get you something to drink?

NATALIE

No, thanks. You're doing stretches. Got out of your brace, I see.

KIM

Yep. Working on my pain management, too.

DANNY

Oh, really? Good for you. Did your doctor clear that?

KIM

Yeah. He gave me a smaller dose. And he sent me to a physical therapist.

DANNY

Wow. He went along with that?

KIM

It was good advice. Don't get used to it.

She picks up her TV Guide from the coffee table and opens it to the crossword puzzle.

KIM

Hey, Danny, I got a new crossword for you. Twelve letters, starts with A.
(reads out of the TV Guide) "Lust or desire leading to sin."

She hands the TV Guide to Danny. Danny glances at the crossword.

DANNY

Concupiscence.

He gives the TV Guide back to Kim.

NATALIE

Whoa.

Kim looks at the puzzle again.

KIM

Sorry, sweetie, that doesn't start with an A. I was thinking Adultery, but that's not long enough, maybe Adulterous...

DANNY

Trust me, Mom. Concupiscence.

KIM

(looking at her crossword) Really? Well, shit. (looks up) So, what's new?

NATALIE

I should go home.

DANNY

Okay.

Kim picks up her crutches and uses them to stand.

KIM

You know what? I'm going to go to the ladies' room. Let you two have some privacy. But not too much privacy.

DANNY

Mom, she's leaving. Nothing's going to happen.

KIM

Never know.

Kim exits into the back hallway on her crutches.

DANNY

Listen, I really did have a good time with you.

NATALIE

Right. Me too.

DANNY

Look, I know I was acting weird. The truth is, I just wanted tonight to be perfect. I've been waiting for it for so long. I guess I was just nervous.

NATALIE

Why? We're still best friends.

DANNY

Yeah, but you have always been so brilliant. I guess I've always felt like our relationship wasn't... balanced.

Natalie hugs him. Then, they start to kiss, then stop, then go for each other's cheeks, then awkwardly kiss on the lips.

NATALIE

Wow, that was awkward. Does our relationship feel balanced now?

DANNY

See? How do you do that?

NATALIE

Do what?

DANNY

Take an awkward moment like that and make it... perfect.

NATALIE

I don't know. I guess it's a gift.

DANNY

Yes it is.

NATALIE

I should go. I'll see you tomorrow, okay?

DANNY

Yes, you will.

Natalie exits, smiling. Danny smiles, too. He looks around the living room. Then, he compulsively grabs the couch and starts moving it. Kim comes back out from the bathroom.

KIM

What the hell are you doing?

DANNY

Mom, just shut up a sec. I'm maximizing the efficiency of this room.

KIM

You're not doing feng shui, are you?

DANNY

No, this is different. I'm getting you the most space in the room. Then, I'm gonna do the bedrooms.

KIM

Why you putting the couch over there? You won't be able to see the TV.

DANNY

Sure you will. You just have to move the TV over there.

KIM

Move the TV?

DANNY

And then you're wasting less floor space. This coffee table seems bulky. Any chance you could trade it in?

KIM

Move the TV?

DANNY

Oh, and by the way, I did your taxes, and you're going to get a three thousand refund this year.

He pulls some papers out of his book bag and hands them to Kim.

KIM

Move the TV?!

DANNY

Mom, forget about the TV. We're moving on. I need to talk with you about our money situation.

KIM

The money again?! What did your father say?

DANNY

I don't know. When I told him I'd get him more money from the government, and that he'd be paying less on the mortgage, he seemed pretty interested.

KIM

Of course. I still don't understand this obsession with money.

DANNY

Yeah, well, that's something else that I wanted to talk about. By the way, you need more energy-efficient windows. You're losing too much heat in the winter. It's ridiculous.

KIM

What?

DANNY

Anyway, I wanted to let you know. The tech school lets you take classes when you're sixteen, and I was thinking of doing a couple night classes next semester. Then, my senior year, I can take a few more.

KIM

The tech school?

DANNY

Yeah.

KIM

Why are you going to the tech school when you're still in high school?

DANNY

I just want to get a head start for college. I asked Mr. Wolf how I would do that, and he said I should look at taking night classes.

KIM

Why are thinking about all these things?

DANNY

You know, I don't get you. Don't parents want what's best for their kids?

KIM

I know, but these plans. Even Natalie doesn't think this way.

DANNY

Yeah, I can't explain it. I'm just seeing things more clearly now.

KIM

Oh, no.

DANNY

Yeah, I'm pretty surprised by it myself.

KIM

Oh, baby. We gotta talk.

She sits on the couch, now at an odd angle in the middle of the living room.

DANNY

Uh-oh. I've heard that before.

KIM

Sit.

DANNY

Fine.

KIM

Do you remember when we took Jakey to that hospital in Madison?

DANNY

Oh my God, you think I'm on drugs.

KIM

It's nothing to be ashamed of. Lots of kids have trouble with high school. They take things to study better. Oprah says that if-

DANNY

No! No Oprah.

KIM

I'm just saying, if you have a problem, you need to get help.

DANNY

Said the black pot to the not-nearly-as-black kettle. How many pills have you taken today?

KIM

You know, that's another thing. Where did this attitude come from? You used to be such a nice boy.

DANNY

So, now because I have a mind of my own, that means I'm not a nice boy?

KIM

That's not what I mean. I love you. I want you to have a mind of your own.

DANNY

Just because I've been quiet, you always thought you could parent me on autopilot. Well, maybe that's not true anymore.

KIM

Danny. Sweetie. You're... different.

DANNY

Mom, I'm not listening to this. I'm not addicted to anything. I don't even know what I could be addicted to. I don't do drugs, I don't drink (unlike some guys I know), I don't overeat. I'm not even addicted to caffeine. No coffee, no soda. The only thing I drink other than water is juice.

KIM

You don't drink coffee anymore?

DANNY

No, mom. No coffee.

KIM

That was our drink. When you were in junior high.

DANNY

Mom, don't be dramatic.

KIM

When did you stop drinking coffee?

DANNY

I don't know. A couple days ago.

KIM

Just like that?

DANNY

Mom, it's no big deal. I just don't want to depend on caffeine to get me through the day.

KIM

Why are you so intense?

DANNY

I'm not, Mom. I just... Grrr... I feel like you don't understand me, and I'm explaining myself as clearly as possible.

KIM

I get what you're saying, sweetie. I just don't know why you're saying it.

DANNY

You know what? I'm going in my room. Good night.

KIM

Good night, Danny. I love you.

DANNY

Yeah, whatever.

Danny enters his bedroom and shuts the door. He lies on his bed, picks up a book and reads.

Kim stands in the living room with the furniture out of place.

KIM

How am I supposed to watch TV?

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

SCENE EIGHT

Danny and Natalie lie on Danny's bed. Natalie rests her head on Danny's chest.

NATALIE

I could lie here forever.

DANNY

Yeah.

Danny smiles.

NATALIE

What are you thinking about?

DANNY

Oh, nothing.

NATALIE

You're so pathetic.

DANNY

What?

NATALIE

I know that look. You're still thinking about the ping-pong tournament.

DANNY

Hey, I was really nervous. I wanted to impress your dad.

NATALIE

Whatever. It's not like you two had never met before.

DANNY

True, but that was the first time I met him since we started going out.

NATALIE

I know, but... I didn't even think you were going to play.

DANNY

I didn't either. But I knew I had to do something drastic. I got on his good side with a little humor up front, but I couldn't talk my way out of the fact that I don't play sports anymore. And the one sport I did play was golf. That didn't seem to impress him.

NATALIE

Well, he *was* an all-state fullback.

DANNY

I know. I heard. A dozen times.

NATALIE

Knock it off. He's just that kind of person.

DANNY

Yeah, and he has a handshake like a vice. Have I never shaken his hand?

NATALIE

Probably not. That's weird, isn't it?

DANNY

I know. I've spent all that time at your house, and your dad never had a reason to shake my hand. Now, just because we're going out, he has to shake my hand. One of those odd social conventions.

NATALIE

Well, you did well. And for the record, my dad was very impressed at the ping-pong tournament.

DANNY

He was? Ha! I knew it.

NATALIE

Don't get full of yourself. You're just lucky you didn't have to play against him.

DANNY

Yeah, big Frank McGraw went down in the third round. What happened?

NATALIE

Watch yourself. You would have been in trouble.

DANNY

Nonsense. I could've beat him.

NATALIE

And that would have been a good thing?

DANNY

True. Now that I think about it, there was probably no easy way out of that situation. If I lose, I'm just a screw-up who used to play golf. But if I win....

NATALIE

Exactly.

DANNY

Well, let's just say that God was on my side that night.

NATALIE

Oh, now we're bringing God into it. You do have an ego.

DANNY

Me? Never. I've never had an ego in my entire life.

NATALIE

Yeah, the past few weeks haven't been reflective of your entire life.

DANNY

What does that mean?

NATALIE

It means that you've been different. I don't care what you say. It's not just a new outlook. Something's different about you.

DANNY

I don't know what to tell you.

NATALIE

Are you nervous about the ACT?

DANNY

No. Why? Are you?

NATALIE

A little.

DANNY

Don't be stupid. You'll do fine.

NATALIE

I know, I'm just still nervous.

DANNY

Well, don't be.

NATALIE

Don't tell me how to feel.

DANNY

Okay. I just think you'll do fine.

NATALIE

Whatever. You're not listening.

DANNY

Yes, I am. Hey, you wanna make out?

NATALIE

Such a pig.

DANNY

Don't call me that. I'm not like other guys. I just want to connect with you.

NATALIE

If you want to connect with me, you should listen when I'm talking.

DANNY

I listen!

Kim enters Danny's room with a basket of clean laundry. She no longer has her crutches, but she still limps.

KIM

Hey, Danny. I got some—Natalie!

Natalie and Danny jump up.

DANNY

Mom, get out of here!

KIM

What is going on here?

DANNY

Nothing, Mom. Just leave us alone.

NATALIE

Seriously, Kim.

KIM

That's Mrs. Dravecky to you, missy.

NATALIE

Okay.

DANNY

Mom, what is the big deal? Nothing happened. We were just taking a nap together. We do it all the time.

KIM

I'm sorry, what?

DANNY

Mom, seriously, why do you have to make such a big deal out of this?

KIM

Because you don't know what can happen.

DANNY

Yes, I do. Nothing ever happens.

KIM

No more "naps." That stops right now.

DANNY

You can't do that.

KIM

I most certainly can. I'm your mother.

DANNY

Don't you trust me?

KIM

Of course I trust you, but-

DANNY

Come on. I'm not Jake here. I'm not stupid.

KIM

No, but you're human.

DANNY

What does that mean?

KIM

You're the genius. You figure it out.

DANNY

So, you're saying I'm stupid.

KIM

No. You don't understand. You are a human being. You don't know how things can happen.

DANNY

Yes, I do. If we just say that we're committed to not letting things happen...

KIM

You need to calm down. You're taking this way too personally.

DANNY

Well, how am I supposed to take it when I tell you that we're not going to let anything happen, and you don't believe me? You either think I'm a liar or you think I'm stupid. Which one is going to be, Mom? Which one?

KIM

Someday, when you're older, and hopefully you won't learn the hard way, you'll understand that being human doesn't make you stupid.

DANNY

You just don't get it.

KIM

What if she gets pregnant?

DANNY

She's not going to get pregnant. You have to have sex to get pregnant!

Bob emerges from the bedroom.

BOB

What's with all the noise?! Some of us have to work around here.

KIM

Sorry, babe. It's Danny. I caught him in his room with Natalie

NATALIE

If it's any consolation, Mr. And Mrs. Dravecky, my parents would kill me if I got pregnant.

DANNY

I can't believe you don't trust me. I'm always looking out for this family. You're welcome, by the way, for doing your taxes. Got you three grand.

NATALIE

OK. I'm sure they're grateful.

KIM

We are grateful. Your dad's proud of you, too.

DANNY

Is that true, Father? You're proud of me.

BOB

I'd keep an eye on that smart-ass lip if I was you.

DANNY

(saluting) Yes, sir!

BOB

You listen to me. You might be a wonder kid...

DANNY

Wunderkind.

BOB

Excuse me?

DANNY

The word is wunderkind.

BOB

You need to watch yourself, junior.

DANNY

Whatever. I can never do enough. I'm rearranging the house. Refinancing the house. Doing your taxes. Looking out for your health. Reworking dad's shift. Oh, and did I mention that I'm applying for scholarships—on my own!

KIM

No one's saying those aren't good things. But family's more impor--

DANNY

Enough with this stupid family. How can we be a family when you don't even trust me?

KIM

Sweetie, we trust you. We just don't want you to make a mistake that you regret later on.

DANNY

What? You mean like Jake?

Kim and Bob look at each other but say nothing.

DANNY (CONT'D)

Ooooooh, so I hit a nerve. Of course, why didn't I think of it? Jake was born September 20, 1993. And your anniversary is...?

They all remain silent.

DANNY (CONT'D)

March 16, 1993. Don't worry, Dad. You remembered this year. You got Mom a foot bath. Well done.

Still, no one says anything.

DANNY (CONT'D)

Well, this makes sense. The parents don't want their children repeating their mistakes. How altruistic.

BOB

Shut up, you little shit.

Kim starts to cry.

DANNY

So, because you two couldn't keep your pants on, I have to listen to some lecture that I don't even need. Great, great.

KIM

Why are you doing this?

DANNY

The truth will set you free, Mom. Don't you get it? The more I learn, the more everything makes sense. (to Bob) So, tell me something, Dad. Did you ever really love Mom? Do you regret marrying her? Do you regret being my father?

NATALIE

Danny, that's enough.

DANNY

Quiet. We're having a breakthrough here.

He walks toward Bob.

DANNY (CONT'D)

Is that why you don't love Jake as much as you love me?

KIM

Daniel!

Bob moves to slap Danny across the face, but Danny ducks. The force of the failed swing causes Bob to stumble and fall on his rear. Kim and Natalie rush to his aid, but Danny doesn't move.

NATALIE

What is wrong with you? He's your father!

DANNY

(smirking) Pathetic. I'm outta here.

He exits through the front door, smirking and chuckling until he gets outside. He walks downstage, then stops chuckling and starts crying. He falls to the ground and starts sobbing.

DANNY (CONT'D)

What is wrong with me?

He reaches into his bag and pulls out another bottle of Blue. He opens the top, pauses, then drinks it all.

DANNY (CONT'D)

That's better.

SCENE NINE

Danny sits in Mr. Wolf's office again. His posture is a little better, and he mumbles less.

DANNY

I saw this painting once. In an art book. It was huge. Took up both pages. It's this tribe of cavemen. And the men are carrying the women on this massive canvas. Made of animal hide, I suppose. There's an old caveman in front. He's really decrepit. He looks like the chief or elder. And the other men, the ones carrying the women, are really... built. Like wrestlers.

MR. WOLF

Interesting.

DANNY

And the women, they just look depressed.

MR. WOLF

I see. Did you like that painting, or did you remember it for another reason?

DANNY

I'm not sure. I haven't thought about it for years. But I remember being surprised by the title.

MR. WOLF

What was it called?

DANNY

It was called, "Cain flees before the curse of Jehovah." Creepy, right?

MR. WOLF

What do you mean?

DANNY

Well, after God banishes Cain, the Bible doesn't say much about him. It just says he had a wife and son. But he was cursed. I mean, no one could kill him. I never thought about what that meant. But then I looked at that painting. And the

old man is very... old. He must have wandered so long, just waiting to die—wanting to die—and it never happened. He was probably barely human when God finally let him die.

MR. WOLF

That is creepy. You know, I've seen the painting you're talking about.

DANNY

In person?

MR. WOLF

Yep. It's in Paris. At the Musee D'Orsay.

DANNY

Why were you in Paris? Backpacking, right?

MR. WOLF

Something like that. Anyway, that painting is huge.

DANNY

How huge?

MR. WOLF

I'm not sure. Something like seventeen feet wide. I tell you, it's nothing compared to "The Coronation of Napoleon."

DANNY

I've seen that one in a book, too. With Napoleon crowning himself. It's in the Louvre, right?

MR. WOLF

Exactly. That one must be fifteen feet high and over twenty feet wide.

DANNY

Now, that's impressive. You lose that in a book.

MR. WOLF

Exactly. Napoleon is almost life size. Five feet tall. Though for Napoleon, maybe that was life size, right?

DANNY

I've heard that Napoleon wasn't as short as people make him out to be.

MR. WOLF

Yes, I heard that, too. I was making a joke.

DANNY

Oh.

The two sit in awkward silence.

DANNY

I heard a joke once. About Cain.

MR. WOLF

How does it go?

DANNY

So, Adam is walking with his two sons, Cain and Abel--they're still little boys. They pass the Garden of Eden, and Adam looks at the Garden with sadness and says, "Boys, that's where your mother ate us out of house and home."

Mr. Wolf chuckles.

DANNY

Not much of a joke, I guess. No punchline.

MR. WOLF

Where did you hear it?

DANNY

On TV. Really late at night.

MR. WOLF

How long ago was that?

DANNY

About three years.

MR. WOLF

Wow, and you still remember it.

DANNY

Yeah, I'm remembering more stuff lately.

MR. WOLF

Clearly. You also have Cain on the brain. Care to tell me why?

DANNY

You wouldn't believe the stuff that's out there on this blue juice. If you know where to look.

MR. WOLF

Really? Like what?

DANNY

Well, like I told you a couple weeks ago, there's not much actual research on it.

MR. WOLF

That's good.

DANNY

But, then, I shifted to the bloggers and the conspiracy theorists. Did you know that there's a entire subculture dedicated to finding trees that are descended from the Tree of Knowledge?

MR. WOLF

From your Bible?

DANNY

What do you mean "*your* Bible"?

MR. WOLF

Nothing. What do you think of that theory? That there are trees descended from the Tree of Knowledge.

DANNY

I don't know. I'm not sure that those trees would be all that special. Even if story of Adam and Eve is true, the reason they were banished was because they disobeyed God, not because of anything particular about the tree.

MR. WOLF

That's very true.

DANNY

So, I started looking in local news. You know, just browsing.

MR. WOLF

How much research do you do?

DANNY

Well, once you're on Blue, a computer can't move fast enough to keep up with your thought process.

MR. WOLF

I know.

DANNY

So, you drink it, too?

MR. WOLF

All the time.

DANNY

So, why aren't you an astrophysicist?

MR. WOLF

I happen to like the work I do. I like spending time with the youth. Besides, Blue doesn't have an effect on me.

DANNY

Who are you?

MR. WOLF

I can understand that you're frustrated, especially considering the fact that you're on Blue, and you feel like you should know. Don't feel bad.

DANNY

Yeah, right.

MR. WOLF

I wanted to make you happy. I wanted you to be successful.

DANNY

So you gave me the blue juice.

MR. WOLF

Yes. I thought it could help you.

DANNY

Why?

MR. WOLF

It's a very unique substance with special properties.

DANNY

Did it work for anyone else?

MR. WOLF

Danny, I meant what I said. I never gave it to anyone else.

DANNY

Seriously?

MR. WOLF

Seriously. So, let's get back to you. What did you find in the local news?

DANNY

Huh? Oh, well. It's hard to distinguish any kind of pattern, but I found three episodes of strange occurrences. They were all fairly recent.

MR. WOLF

What happened?

DANNY

Well, the first story was about Amy Wood. She was a high school student who felt like she was too fat. She tried everything, but she couldn't lose the weight. Then, she just went into hiding for a few weeks, and when she showed up in public again, she was thinner. A lot thinner.

MR. WOLF

Very sad. Mistakes on my part.

DANNY

I thought you never gave the juice to anyone else.

MR. WOLF

No, not deliberately. But I planted trees close to where these people lived, and they found them.

DANNY

How many trees are there?

MR. WOLF

A few dozen. I wanted to give people a chance to be happy.

DANNY

How's that working out?

MR. WOLF

I am the first to admit that when it comes to you people, I am far from objective. I'm quite fond of you all. I had to remove some of the trees.

DANNY

See, there you go again with the "you people" talk. Why do you say that?

MR. WOLF

Let's just say that I'm not from around here.

DANNY

What, are you from, like, Canada or something?

MR. WOLF

Farther north. Much farther.

DANNY

I know my last dose of juice is wearing off, but it sounds to me like you're saying that you're... I don't know.

MR. WOLF

What do you think I'm saying?

DANNY

It's too crazy to even say.

MR. WOLF

Think of everything that's happened in this town. Amy Wood, the sheriff, the suicide cult. When did all of these things start happening?

DANNY

Well, the Amy Wood story happened about ten years ago. So, if that was the first incident...

MR. WOLF

It was.

DANNY

Okay. So ten years.

MR. WOLF

Do you know when I first came to this town?

DANNY

I can guess.

MR. WOLF

I'm sure you can.

DANNY

So, what? You brought the tree with you?

MR. WOLF

I didn't bring any trees. Who needs a whole tree when you have—

DANNY

Seeds. Of course. Okay, why did you bring the seeds with you?

MR. WOLF

That fruit reminds me of home. I needed something for when I felt homesick.

DANNY

What is your home like?

MR. WOLF

Different from here and yet not so different.

DANNY

What does this juice do?

MR. WOLF

To you people? I still haven't figured it out. My guess is that it has to do with the thing that you want more than anything else in the world. If a girl wants to be thin, Blue helps her. If a man wants to be stronger, Blue makes him stronger.

DANNY

What about the cult? Did they want to die?

MR. WOLF

If I had to guess, I'd say that they wanted to escape.

DANNY

Be careful what you wish for, right?

MR. WOLF

Or maybe they wanted to be enlightened and they just drank too much.

DANNY

How much is too much?

MR. WOLF

You should get going. You have the ACTs tomorrow.

DANNY

Yeah, I suppose you're right. Oh, Mr. Wolf.

MR. WOLF

Yes?

DANNY

I don't really like our current system. You giving me one ball a day just isn't working.

MR. WOLF

What do you propose?

DANNY

Well, you could give me a larger amount at a time. That way, I don't have to miss a bottle if you're sick.

MR. WOLF

Let's just say that, in this atmosphere, I don't get sick.

DANNY

Well, that's good to know. All the same, could you bring a weeks worth the next time we meet? Monday morning?

MR. WOLF

Why should I do what you tell me?

DANNY

Because if you don't, I'll report you.

MR. WOLF

To whom? The police? What would you tell them?

DANNY

Just that I thought you were drugging me with some kind of juice. Maybe I'd throw in some vague mention of molestation. Would that do the trick?

MR. WOLF

Now, wait a minute. If you turn me in, you'll be cut off from Blue.

DANNY

But you've already told me. There's a tree on your property. I'm sure with a little hard work, I could find the others, as well.

MR. WOLF

Why are you doing this?

DANNY

Oh, and depending on my mood, I might mention that I believe you to be an extraterrestrial. They'll think I'm crazy, but sooner or later, they'll gain access to your home, and they'll discover that some of my story checks out.

MR. WOLF

What do you want?

DANNY

I told you. I want Blue to myself so that I can drink it when I need it.

MR. WOLF

That's it?

DANNY

Blue is all that matters to me.

MR. WOLF

I only have two extra bottles in my drawer.

He pulls two bottles out of the drawer. Danny picks them up and puts them in his bag.

DANNY

That'll do for now. Bring the rest on Monday.

MR. WOLF

Remember, don't drink more than one bottle tonight. Understand?

DANNY

Yes, sir!

MR. WOLF

Good luck on the ACTs.

DANNY

Pleasure doing business with you. Whoever or whatever you are.

Danny exits.

SCENE TEN

Kim, Jake, and Natalie stand in the living room of the Dravecky house.

Kim wears an old, nineties-era navy blue floral dress. Bob wears a dress shirt with a sweater on top. Jake wears a polo. Natalie wears a dressy sweater and khakis.

Danny is wearing a new suit. He rushes around, addressing each problem as quickly as possible.

DANNY

Okay, everyone. Places.

JAKE

This is so stupid. We don't act like this, and we don't dress like this. Why do we have to put on a show?

KIM

Because someone is coming over here. And for once, goddamit, we're going to be a happy family. Even if it kills us.

DANNY

(to Natalie) That's what you're wearing?

NATALIE

What's wrong with it?

DANNY

Nothing. You just look.... schooly.

NATALIE

It's a newspaper article about the ACTs. How should I look?

DANNY

I don't know. I was hoping you'd wear something a little more... ridonkulous.

NATALIE

What does that even mean?

JAKE

I believe the meaning of that word is "crazy good."

NATALIE

I know what it means. I just don't understand why suddenly I have to be your trophy girlfriend.

DANNY

What? Where is this coming from?

NATALIE

I took the ACTs too, Danny. Did you realize that?

DANNY

Yeah, of course. (to Bob) Seriously, Dad? A sweater? Don't you have a tie somewhere?

KIM

He gave up overtime to be here.

NATALIE

I may not have scored perfect, but I did damn well, and I'm proud of that.

JAKE

You tell him, Nat.

DANNY

Shut up! Shut up, you fucking troglodyte.

JAKE

Hey, that's like a caveman, right?

DANNY

Hey, look, you can teach it. (to Natalie) You should be proud of your ACTs. That's what I'm saying, be proud. You know, if you got it, flaunt it.

NATALIE

I don't know who you are, but you're not Danny.

KIM

Thank you. Someone finally said it.

DANNY

Mom, a little privacy, please.

KIM

I'm sorry, sweetie. You've changed. Everyone knows, but we don't want to say anything, because you get so angry.

The doorbell rings.

DANNY

That's her. Now, remember everyone: happy family.

JAKE

Some happy family.

NATALIE

Why do I have to be here again?

DANNY

Because you're my girlfriend, and we've known each other forever, and I want you to be part of this happy freaking moment!

The doorbell rings again.

DANNY

Okay. Game faces, people.

Danny opens the door to reveal AUBREY SANCHEZ, 33, a reporter in a business suit and skirt.

DANNY (CONT'D)

Hello, Miss Sanchez. Welcome to our home. This is my family and my girlfriend Natalie.

AUBREY

Thank you for having me.

They all shake hands with Aubrey.

DANNY (CONT'D)

Please. Sit down.

She sits in the recliner. Danny sits on the side of the couch closest to her. Kim sits in the middle of the couch. Natalie sits on the other side of Kim. Bob and Jake stand behind the couch.

She removes a digital recorder from her bag.

AUBREY

Thank you. I'm just going to record our conversation. Makes it easier to write later.

DANNY

Of course.

AUBREY

So, let's get started. Mr. Dravecky, how do you feel to have achieved this feat?

DANNY

Well, Miss Sanchez, it is Miss, right?

AUBREY

Yes.

DANNY

Hard to believe.

AUBREY

Back to the question, Mr. Dravecky.

DANNY

Well, I'm frankly as surprised as anyone.

AUBREY

Do you know your IQ offhand? Are you a genius?

DANNY

No. I only scored an 89 on an IQ test.

AUBREY

Really? Then, how do you explain the ACT scores?

DANNY

Miss Sanchez, the ACT tests are a set of, let's say rules. If you know the rules, you know how to succeed.

AUBREY

Are you talking about cheating?

DANNY

No. Oh, God, no. What I'm talking about is not wasting time and energy. Not studying things that you know aren't going to be on the test.

AUBREY

How do you know what's not going to be on the test?

DANNY

Well, it's not as though I know the exact questions. I merely looked at the ACTs from the past five years. Then, I read what I knew were the relevant chapters in all of my textbooks. And some other textbooks, as well.

AUBREY

Other textbooks.

DANNY

Yes, well, I found that this school district's choice of textbooks was sadly outdated. So, I had to improvise.

AUBREY

Okay, I ask this during all my interviews—

DANNY

My answer isn't Albert Einstein.

He laughs.

AUBREY

Excuse me?

DANNY

Usually, when a reporter or interviewer of some kind has a stock question, it's "What famous person from history would you like to meet?" I just wanted to reassure you that I wasn't going to pick Einstein.

AUBREY

Really? Why not?

DANNY

Well, for one, he wasn't that smart. His IQ wasn't particularly high, and-

AUBREY

Neither was yours.

DANNY

What?

AUBREY

Your IQ wasn't that high either.

DANNY

True, but there are different circumstances.

AUBREY

Like what?

DANNY

Well, Einstein didn't... He couldn't. Oppenheimer. My answer would be Oppenheimer.

AUBREY

Interesting. That wasn't my question.

DANNY

Excuse me?

AUBREY

The famous person from history. That wasn't going to be my question.

DANNY

Oh, wow. Well, what is your question, then?

AUBREY

What is the meaning of life?

Danny starts to speak, but stops himself. He has another false start, but again can't put any words together.

DANNY

If you go back to Plato, you'll see.... This is a really good question, by the way.

AUBREY

Thanks. I like it.

DANNY

From the beginning of time, man has always... Well, woman, too. I'm just having a tough time putting it into....

AUBREY

We can move on.

DANNY

No, no. I got, I got it. You ready?

AUBREY

Sure.

DANNY

(seductively) To love.

AUBREY

To love?

DANNY

Yes.

AUBREY

What does that even mean?

DANNY

To love everything. To fall in love. To love oneself. To love love.

AUBREY

Very poetic.

DANNY

Right?

AUBREY

Why don't we shift gears a bit? How do you explain your change?

DANNY

What do you mean?

AUBREY

Come on, Mr. Dravecky. Let's be honest. Did you take any substance? Maybe caffeine? How did you pull off this transformation?

DANNY

I thought you were coming here to talk about my success.

AUBREY

Now, don't get defensive. This isn't an attack. I should explain, I'm doing a story about the pressure to succeed in high school and what kids are doing to meet that demand.

DANNY

How is that supposed to make me feel better?

AUBREY

No one's blaming you here. You're a victim.

Jake lets out a loud laugh.

DANNY

You're kind of blindsiding me here.

AUBREY

Really? I would have thought that a genius would be able to anticipate this.

DANNY

Being brilliant doesn't make me psychic.

AUBREY

Mr. Dravecky, have you recently been outside the country?

DANNY

What?

AUBREY

Have you left the continental U.S. for any reason?

DANNY

Lady, I hardly ever leave the state. What makes you think I could afford to leave the country?

AUBREY

Fair enough. Have you encountered anyone who travels frequently?

DANNY

No.

NATALIE

(smugly) Hasn't Mr. Wolf traveled a little?

DANNY

Shut up, Natalie!

AUBREY

Who's Mr. Wolf.

DANNY

No one. He's my guidance counselor.

AUBREY

Where has he traveled?

DANNY

I don't know. Europe. When he was in his twenties.

AUBREY

Has he given you anything?

DANNY

What? Like drugs?

AUBREY

Fruit.

BOB

Fruit?

AUBREY

Any kind of exotic fruit.

DANNY

No. Of course not.

JAKE

What about the juice?

DANNY

Shut up, you asshole!

KIM

The juice in the fridge?

JAKE

That's right. The juice in the fridge.

KIM

That hasn't been there for weeks.

DANNY

No, it's hasn't.

AUBREY

What kind of juice?

DANNY

I didn't know drinking juice was a crime.

AUBREY

I'm not the police. I'm just a reporter.

DANNY

Look, Miss Sanchez. I have extended my home to you, and you are aboobing, abusing my hospitality.

AUBREY

I'm sorry, what?

DANNY

There is no reason why I can't get a perfect ACT score. I am a smart person. I am! Me!

BOB

(to Kim) What's wrong with him?

KIM

I don't know.

JAKE

I'm telling you, it's the juice.

DANNY
No reason. You are referring to isolated, pacific events. *Specific* events.

AUBREY
Are you alright?

DANNY
I'm fine.

KIM
What's wrong with him?

NATALIE
I don't know.

Blood flows out of Danny's nose.

AUBREY
Your nose is bleeding.

DANNY
What?

AUBREY
Your nose is bleeding.

Danny touches the blood.

DANNY
What the fuck is this?

KIM
Tilt your head back.

NATALIE
No, don't do that. Here, use this.

She grabs a dish towel from the kitchen and puts it on
Danny's nose. Aubrey sits quietly in the chair.

KIM
Just hold that there. I'll get you some ice.

DANNY
Thank you. (to Natalie) When did we get here?

What? NATALIE

Why are we at my house? I thought we were going to your house. DANNY

Kim comes back with and ice pack. KIM

Sit down. KIM

Danny sits on the couch. KIM (CONT'D)

(to Natalie) What's wrong with him? NATALIE

I have no idea. KIM

Is it drugs? DANNY

(to Natalie) You're so shallow. You wouldn't even go out with me until I got smart. Then.... walla wakka. KIM

What is happening? DANNY

Kah neh fool yish. BOB

What did he say? NATALIE

I have no idea. The sound of a heart monitor can now be heard- faintly, becoming louder during the rest of the scene. DANNY

Kah neh fool yish! NATALIE

Are you okay?

DANNY

Tepota. Pee mau noo soket.

BOB

I swear to God, it's gibberish.

DANNY

(shaking his head) Ka. Ka. Wha ninchi poko wai nosh zuka. Ka!

NATALIE

Danny. We can't understand you. What are you trying to say?

DANNY

Eeneeb, kufka sanage mehn emick rekeb.

BOB

I'm calling the hospital.

NATALIE

Good idea.

DANNY

(shaking his head) Ka! Grahm ninchi di theb. Oh, etalp.

Danny collapses on the couch.

KIM

What happened?

The LIGHTS FADE OUT, as Danny fades from consciousness, but the dialogue continues.

NATALIE

Oh, my God.

KIM

Tell the ambulance to hurry.

NATALIE

Danny, wake up! Danny, can you hear me?

The heart monitor sound is now at full volume.

SCENE ELEVEN

Lights fade up. The house and the chemistry room are gone. The entire stage is now a hospital. On the stage right side is Danny's room. Danny lies in the bed. Bob, Kim, and Natalie sit next to his bed.

Lights up on Danny's hospital room. Danny wakes up. The sound of the heart monitor continues into this scene.

DANNY
Where am I?

KIM
You're in the hospital.

DANNY
Where are Dad and Jake?

KIM
Your dad is downstairs. He's on his way.

DANNY
And Jake?

NATALIE
He's... sleeping.

DANNY
Figures. What happened?

NATALIE
We don't know.

KIM
They're still running some tests.

NATALIE
Toxicology reports turned up negative.

DANNY
Of course they did. I didn't drink anything.

NATALIE
I know. But they just wanted to be sure.

DANNY

Was it an allergic reaction?

NATALIE

No.

DANNY

Well, then, what was it?

KIM

They don't know, sweetie. As soon as they know, they'll tell us.

DANNY

Wait a minute, if they don't know what it was, how did they get me out of it?

NATALIE

They gave you a blood transfusion and they've been pumping you full of saline.

DANNY

All that fluid, you'd think I'd have to go to the bathroom.

KIM

You did, sweetie.

Danny lifts up his sheet and looks underneath.

DANNY

Awww, man.

NATALIE

The catheter didn't go in so easy.

DANNY

You watched?

NATALIE

No. (pause) I heard.

DANNY

Oh, God.

KIM

It's nothing to be embarrassed about.

DANNY

I'm pretty sure I said some things.

KIM

You told them to take the catheter out before you shoved it up their asses, sweetie.

DANNY

No. Before that. Back at the house.

KIM

Oh, that.

DANNY

I'm sorry.

KIM

You should apologize to Nat.

DANNY

What? What did I say to her?

NATALIE

Something about the only reason I'd ever date you was because you were a pretentious snob like me.

DANNY

Shit. Where did I get the blood transfusion?

NATALIE

Well, none of us were a match, so...

DANNY

No, not Jake. Is his blood even clean?

KIM

Yes, it is. You should be grateful.

DANNY

And that's why he's sleeping right now.

NATALIE

"Fainted" would be a better word.

DANNY

I didn't think he was the squeamish type.

KIM

There's a lot about us you don't know.

Bob enters.

DANNY (CONT'D)

Dad!

BOB

I'd like to talk to my son.

Kim and Natalie exit. Kim kisses Bob on the cheek as she exits.

BOB

I talked to your brother.

DANNY

I know, I know. He gave me his blood, and I owe him for the rest of my life.

BOB

No, I wasn't going to talk about that. Everything you said is true, though.

DANNY

What, why? He's such a trog, trog... You know what I mean.

BOB

He told me about the juice.

DANNY

What about it?

BOB

Apparently, that's your little secret to success.

DANNY

It's just juice.

Bob reveals a bottle of Blue.

BOB

Well, if this is just juice, you won't mind if I dump it out.

He opens the cap and starts to pour it in the floor.

DANNY

Dad, don't!

BOB

(playfully) Why not?

DANNY

Where did you find that?

Bob puts the cap back on the bottle and sets it on the floor.

BOB

In your room. I already dumped out what you had in the fridge. This is your last bottle. It's probably old and moldy.

DANNY

Give it to me!

BOB

Look at you. You're like some junkie. When I see you like this, it kills me, Danny. It kills my damn heart.

DANNY

You should talk.

BOB

I gave up drinking a long time ago, son.

DANNY

I have no talent, Dad. Nothing.

BOB

What about golf?

DANNY

Dad, I was terrible.

BOB

Good enough to make the team.

DANNY

Barely.

BOB

Well, that was never your real talent.

DANNY

What are you talking about?

BOB

You really don't remember, do you?

DANNY

What are you talking about?

BOB

Pictures. Painting, drawing. When you were a kid, you loved to make pictures.

DANNY

That was just a hobby. I was, like, nine.

BOB

No, you did it until you were thirteen. The therapists told us to keep it up. They said it was great for someone with dyslexia.

DANNY

Shit, I don't remember that at all.

BOB

Yeah. Then, you got into golf, then you wanted to run your own limo business.

DANNY

So?

BOB

You got all of those things from me.

DANNY

What are you talking about?

BOB

You know I tried to be a golfer. I was on the team in high school. I went to state. And I mentioned starting a limo business a long time ago. Never amounted to anything.

DANNY

When?

BOB

You were little. Three, four, maybe.

DANNY

I don't believe you.

BOB

Ask your mother.

DANNY

What's your point?

BOB

The real problem isn't your dyslexia. It's you. You have to get over the fact that you're different. You can't go through life copying everyone else. It won't work.

DANNY

Yeah, but look at you. I mean, you work at the plant. You hate it.

BOB

Yeah, well, I got bitter. I wanted to be a golfer, and I blew it. I don't want the same thing to happen to you.

DANNY

Oh.

Bob picks up the bottle of Blue again.

BOB

Now, as for this...

DANNY

Dad, please don't dump it out. I need it. It's my last bottle.

BOB

Okay. I won't throw it out.

DANNY

Thank you.

BOB

You will.

DANNY

What? Dad, didn't you hear the doctor? If I stop cold turkey, it could put me into a rebound effect. I could get really stupid.

BOB

Our actions have consequences—even when we're the victim. You have to face 'em.

Bob guides Danny out of his hospital bed and towards the bathroom.

DANNY

I get what you're saying, I really do. But if I don't take that, I could get brain damaged.

BOB

Come on, if I let you take it just this once, you'll be able to figure out how to get more. I'm sure Mr. Wolf had a secret system.

DANNY

I promise, I won't look for more. I just need to slow down the rebound effect. So it's not so hard.

BOB

Dump it.

DANNY

In the toilet?

BOB

Yep.

Danny dumps the contents of the bottle into the toilet, but he leaves a little behind.

BOB

All of it.

Danny dumps the rest.

DANNY

There. I did it. Can you please leave me alone?

BOB

Flush it.

DANNY

What?

BOB

You heard me.

Danny flushes the toilet.

BOB (CONT'D)

Would you have drank that out of the toilet?

Danny says nothing.

BOB (CONT'D)

You know what? I don't want to know. Get back to bed.

Danny walks back to the bed and gets in.

BOB

Get some sleep.

SCENE FOURTEEN

Danny sleeps in his hospital bed. Mr. Wolf creeps in and wakes him up.

MR. WOLF

Danny! Wake up!

DANNY

Hey! What are you doing here? Where's my family?

MR. WOLF

Shhh! We don't have much time.

DANNY

Seriously, where did they all go?

MR. WOLF

They went to lunch. Listen-

DANNY

Do you have any idea what you put me through?

MR. WOLF

Yes. I read the paper.

DANNY

I'm in the newspaper?

MR. WOLF

Of course. You had an episode and collapsed in front of a reporter.

DANNY

Oh, man. And I said all that stuff.

MR. WOLF

Do you remember what you said?

DANNY

I just remember saying "I don't want to go the hospital."

MR. WOLF

And you did say it. Just not in English.

DANNY

What language was it?

MR. WOLF

Are you happy in your life?

DANNY

I... I don't know.

MR. WOLF

Focus. Think. I can't give you Blue right now because it will take too long to take effect.

DANNY

What?

MR. WOLF

Danny! I have to leave. Now!

DANNY

Is the mother ship calling you home?

MR. WOLF

In a word, yes.

DANNY

Crazy alien.

MR. WOLF

You could be a crazy alien, too.

DANNY

What the hell are you talking about?

MR. WOLF

Aren't you frustrated with this world—this imperfect, fallen, corrupt world?

DANNY

Everyone feels like that sometimes.

MR. WOLF

True, but I could free you.

DANNY

Why don't you free us all?

MR. WOLF

I'd like to, but... Look, these are questions we've been debating for thousands of years. I can't sum up intergalactic history in thirty seconds. I've chosen you. Do you accept or not?

DANNY

You're crazy.

MR. WOLF

You don't have to decide right now, but I have to leave. I can't be seen on this planet anymore.

He pulls a small vial of blue out of his pocket.

MR. WOLF (CONT'D)

Here. This is Blue in a highly concentrated form. If you drink it all, it will kill your body, but your...

DANNY

Spirit?

MR. WOLF

Crude term, but it'll do. Your spirit will be transferred to a new body—a perfect you.

DANNY

What makes a perfect me? No dyslexia?

MR. WOLF

Not just dyslexia. Everything you've ever disliked about yourself will simply be gone. You'll be truly free, not confined by any ugly flaws.

DANNY

Sounds like my spirit would be uploaded.

MR. WOLF

Well, uploaded and then downloaded.

DANNY

If I drink this bottle of Blue.

MR. WOLF

Yes.

DANNY

I don't understand. Where will my spirit go in between?

MR. WOLF

What do you mean?

DANNY

Where will I be after the upload but before the download?

MR. WOLF

That's a rather surprising question from the Blue-less Danny.

DANNY

You can't learn something if you don't ask. All Blue did was help me remember stuff I already knew.

MR. WOLF

And it made it easier to learn new things, as well.

DANNY

Right. What I'm saying is that Blue didn't make me smarter. I still had to do that on my own. I had to ask questions. I guess that's one habit I've kept.

MR. WOLF

That's a good habit to keep.

DANNY

You still haven't answered my question.

MR. WOLF

Does it really matter?

DANNY

Yeah! I mean, we're talking about my spirit. Does it go into some kind of spirit hard drive or something?

MR. WOLF

I'm not in the IT department.

DANNY

I still think you know.

MR. WOLF

Your "spirit" would enter what can best be described as a spirit scanner. It records all of your experiences and all of your memories. And then, it creates a new, completely organic, completely biological body for you.

DANNY

How does it make a body from a spirit?

MR. WOLF

Your spirit remembers your body. I have to run. You have five minutes to make up your mind.

DANNY

That's it?

MR. WOLF

I told you. I have to leave now. They're waiting for me.

DANNY

How are you going to get there?

MR. WOLF

How do you think?

Mr. Wolf pulls another small bottle of concentrated Blue out of his pocket.

DANNY

How many times have you done this?

MR. WOLF

More than enough. I hope you make the right decision.

Mr. Wolf exits the room. Danny sits in silence for a few seconds.

Then, the door opens and Natalie, Jake, Kim and Bob all enter. Danny quickly puts the bottle of Blue under his blanket.

DANNY

Hey, everyone.

KIM

Hi, sweetie.

DANNY

How's lunch?

BOB

It was fine.

DANNY

Listen, I wanted to talk to you all. Where's Natalie?

BOB

She went to the chapel.

JAKE

I didn't know she was religious.

DANNY

She's not, or at least, she wasn't.

JAKE

I guess you just have that effect.

DANNY

Shut up.

KIM

What did you want to talk about, Danny?

DANNY

I wanted to ask you some questions? When I was freaking out—you know, when I wasn't speaking English and when I fell over on the couch—what were you thinking?

KIM

What kind of question is that?

DANNY

Nothing. I just was wondering if you guys thought I had...

BOB

Checked out?

DANNY

Yeah.

JAKE

Well, I was happy. I'd get your iPod.

KIM

Jakey!

JAKE

What? This is stupid. (to Danny) What do you want us to say? "We love you"? Gimme a break.

DANNY

Sorry I brought it up. I had a near-death experience, and I just wanted to know what you thought.

KIM

Look, Danny. We know why this happened, and we know why you did it. But it sounds like you and your father had a talk, and—

DANNY

Why did you let Jake go?

BOB

What?

DANNY

Three years ago. You had a fight with Jake, and he said he wanted to leave. You just let him go.

JAKE

Look, Danny, we don't need to talk about this.

BOB

It was his choice.

DANNY

He was fifteen. I was just thirteen, and I had to watch my brother leave.

JAKE

It's because I crashed the car.

BOB

That's what you think?

JAKE

Uhh, yeah. I left the same night I crashed the car, so...

BOB

You are such an idiot.

KIM

Bob, don't.

BOB

You were out of control. Ever since you were a little kid, you never respected me. I'd tell you "Don't touch that," and you'd touch it. You never listened. And you kept not listening until you were fifteen, and I'd had enough.

DANNY

So, you let him go to Milwaukee and live on the streets?

BOB

We didn't know he was in Milwaukee. It's a hundred and fifty miles away! We had the police put out an alert here in town. And in La Crosse and in Madison. Nothing.

JAKE

Yeah, but I came back.

BOB

A week later, and then after another week, you'd be gone again. I didn't know how you'd leave. You obviously couldn't drive.

JAKE

You never paid any attention to me. Neither of you. It was always about Danny. "Oh, Danny has dyslexia", "Oh, Danny needs special attention." Where the hell was I?

BOB

That's what you thought?

JAKE

Well, did you come looking for me? When I was in Milwaukee?

BOB

We didn't know you were there!

JAKE

I bet you would have gone to Milwaukee for Danny-Boy.

KIM

Jakey, that's not fair.

JAKE

Don't call me that. You only do that to pretend that Danny isn't your favorite.

KIM

Now, that's really not fair.

JAKE

Sometimes, Mom, the truth isn't fair.

KIM

It was never about favorites. You and your father never got along. Danny never really wanted me around, so I... I might have given you too much attention, but you were always so sweet with me. When you were little.

JAKE

Really?

KIM

I'd try so hard to love Danny, and he'd just go into his own world. Painting and drawing. All the time. I was never sure he really loved me. Even though I tried everything to help him. But you, you loved the attention.

DANNY

I didn't know you felt that way.

JAKE

Of course you didn't know. You never knew. You got to stay in your perfect little world and let the rest of us make adjustments for you. You!

DANNY

Jake, I...

JAKE

And then you get over your dyslexia, and who are we looking at? Hey, it's Danny. Again!

DANNY

I don't know what to say. I'm sorry.

JAKE

Sorry won't cut it. Do you hear me? SORRY WON'T CUT IT!!!

DANNY

I have to go to the bathroom.

Danny gets up from his bed, keeping one hand on his stomach inside his hospital gown.

KIM

Should you be walking around?

DANNY

I'm fine.

BOB

What's wrong with your stomach?

DANNY

Nothing. I just really have to go.

Danny turns the lights on in the bathroom. He takes the bottle of Blue out from under his gown.

DANNY (CONT'D)

It's me. It's always been me. I'm the problem.

He opens the bottle. He starts to put it to his mouth, then stops.

DANNY (CONT'D)

Not anymore.

He dumps the Blue down the toilet and flushes. He exits the bathroom.

NATALIE

You okay?

He nods.

DANNY

(to Kim) Did you know that crossword puzzles are good therapy for someone with dyslexia?

He gets back into his bed.

KIM

Yes. I did.

DANNY

You should bring one by. It'll help with my recovery.

KIM

I, ummm, I brought my TV Guide. I have it in my purse.

DANNY

Well, let's go.

KIM

Okay, well, I've been working on it a little, but I thought you might like eight across.

DANNY

Fire away.

KIM

Eight letters. Starts with a J, ends with a Y. Former golfer. Nickname "Wild Thing."

DANNY

This is a good one. It's John Daly.

KIM

That fits.

JAKE

So easy.

DANNY

I see. And you would have gotten it right?

JAKE

Uhh, yeah. I golf, too.

DANNY

Really? When?

JAKE

At the driving range.

BOB

With my clubs.

JAKE

Just that one time. I bought my own set.

DANNY

With what?

I work. JAKE

Where? DANNY

For the city. I do road maintenance and crap like that. JAKE

I didn't know that. DANNY

I know you didn't. JAKE

A voice speaks over the hospital P.A. system.

P.A. VOICE
Attention! Code Blue - Adult. All available staff report to the third floor.
Repeat, Code Blue - Adult.

We're on the third floor. BOB

Oh, I hope they're okay. KIM

Natalie enters.

Hey, you guys will never guess who that emergency alert is for. NATALIE

(rhetorically) Who? DANNY

Mr. Wolf! NATALIE

Mr. Wolf is here? KIM

Son of a bitch. BOB

What's he doing here? KIM

DANNY

Who knows?

KIM

Don't be so funny about it. Do you know what that man did to you?

DANNY

I'm well aware, Mom.

BOB

He's got some balls coming back here when you're in the hospital.

NATALIE

Yeah, but what happened to him?

P.A. VOICE

Attention, all staff, cancel Code Blue. Repeat, cancel Code Blue.

KIM

He must be okay.

DANNY

Maybe. Listen, do you have still have those pastels you got me for my twelfth birthday?

KIM

Yeah, I think they're somewhere in the basement.

DANNY

Could you bring those tomorrow when you visit?

KIM

Sure.

DANNY

And could you take the blue ones out? Please.

KIM

Sure.

DANNY

Thanks.

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