

The Red Boy

a play
by

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For my brothers.

The children cried: 'Mummy!'
'I have been good!'
'Why is it dark! Dark!'

You can see them
going down
you can see the marks
of small feet here and there
going down

— Tadeusz Rózewicz
"Massacre of the Innocents"

Prologue: Dusk

Let's begin in darkness, that's as good a place as any.

Silence.

Faintly, the slight squeal of metal on metal. Measured, continuous, and regular.

The lights rise slowly.

A cloud-swept sky, stained red with dusk.

A playground. Swings and roundabouts. Slides. Monkey bars. Cement tubes and crawl spaces. Rough concrete and splintered wood, flaking paint, trash littered sand, and rusted metal.

Not a safe place for children.

All of this is bordered by a large concrete ring about a foot high, set into the ground as a sort of curb or barrier. It is filled with sand.

On one side of the playground, just outside the ring, a bench; wooden slats worn smooth by years of watchful mothers.

On the other, just within the ring, the swings. And behind them, a small stand of evergreens suggesting a larger wood beyond.

A young boy in a red sweater is swinging. He pumps his legs, rising and falling as the chain squeals in protest.

Long silence, but for the sound of the swings.

Then, the flare of a match from within the trees behind the swings. A spark, a glimpse of a face fading to the dim glow of a cigarette, the faint shadow of smoke being exhaled.

The boy continues swinging, oblivious to the red eye of the cigarette pulsing silently behind him in the shadows between the hanging boughs.

The sky darkens slowly and the light falls away to shadow once again.

In the darkness, there is only the sound of the swings. Abruptly, it stops. There's a metallic rattle from the chain.

Silence.

In the darkness, there's a small exhalation, fast and brief.

Long silence.

Then, another cough, then another, and another. A chain of them, choking gasps, leading us quickly through the darkness into the first scene.

Act I: Spring

In the darkness, the low sound of coughing continues.

Rising beneath it, we hear the voices of children calling and laughing.

The lights rise on a bright spring morning at the playground.

Children at play. On the swings, digging in the sand, going down the slide, climbing on the monkey bars. They laugh and scream and chase each other.

The boy in the red sweater is among the other children. He plays alone, digging in the sand.

Sitting on the bench, two women watch the children as they play.

The first of these, Helen, is smoking a cigarette and reading. She glances up from time to time to check the children.

The other, April, is a bit younger than Helen and rather pregnant. At rise, she is coughing.

Helen, glances over.

HELEN

All right?

APRIL

Fine, really, I'm fine...

...Helen holds her cigarette out at arm's length...

HELEN

...it's not..?

APRIL

...no, no . . . no, really...

HELEN

...I can put it out...

APRIL

...oh, no, no...

HELEN

...you're sure?

APRIL

Yes, yes. Thank you. Yes. Just snuck up on me, is all.

HELEN

Are you going to be sick?

APRIL

No, no . . . I'm fine. Really. Thank you.

Helen returns to her book.

April manages to get herself under control. She turns her attention to the children once again.

A little girl takes a spill at the bottom of the slide. She begins to cry and Helen rises from the bench, hurrying over.

HELEN

Oh, oh, oh sweetheart, sweetheart . . . did you fall?

MARY

Yeah...

HELEN

...oh, sweetheart. Let me see...

MARY

...hurts...

HELEN

...show me...

MARY

...bleeding...

HELEN
...where, oh, it's just a little scrape...

MARY
...it hurts...

HELEN
...I know it does, but it's alright...

MARY
...oh...

HELEN
...now, now, now look, see, it's just a small little....

MARY
...ooh, ooh, it hurts...

HELEN
...here...

*...she takes out a tissue and dabs at the
scraped knee...*

MARY
...ooh, no, no, it's hurting...

HELEN
...hold on, now I'm almost done...

MARY
...need a band-aid.

HELEN
You do?

MARY
Uh huh.

HELEN
You need a band-aid?

MARY
Uh huh.

HELEN
Oh, I don't think so.

MARY
I'm bleeding.

HELEN
I don't have a band-aid.

MARY
I'm bleeding. I need one.

HELEN
Well, when we get home we can put one on it.

MARY
I need one now.

HELEN
You do?

MARY
Uh huh.

HELEN
Well . . . should we go home now to get one? Are you ready to leave?

Pause.

HELEN
Are you?

MARY
Can we come back? After?

HELEN
Mm, probably not today, sweetheart. Do you want to go?

MARY
No.

HELEN
Sure?

MARY

Not yet.

HELEN

Alright then.

Released, Mary runs off.

Helen returns to the bench and sits down. She watches the children for a moment.

On the playground, Mary displays her wound for the other children.

April catches Helen's eye and they nod to each other, smiling.

APRIL

She's very cute.

HELEN

Thank you.

APRIL

How old is she?

HELEN

Seven. When are you due?

APRIL

Oh, soon. First part of June. They say it could be sooner.

HELEN

They always say that on the first one.

APRIL

Is it that obvious?

HELEN

A little.

APRIL

What gave me away?

HELEN

Oh, I don't know. No stroller to drag around, no jackets to hold, no sand-filled shoes and socks. No weeds that look like flowers but are really weeds but you'll take them home and put them in a glass of water anyway just to acknowledge that they were given to you. You'll find out about all of that soon enough.

APRIL

I suppose I will.

HELEN

Count on it. How far along are you? Oh, I'm sorry. Stupid question. You're due in June. I can do the math.

APRIL

It's alright.

HELEN

At least you'll be done before summer starts up. It's hell, being pregnant in August. How are you feeling?

APRIL

Not too bad. The first few months were tougher than I expected, but my doctor says I'm in the home stretch and...

HELEN

...mm, they always say that.

APRIL

I suppose it's no use complaining.

HELEN

Were you sick at all?

APRIL

Oh, no. Not really. Once or twice the first few months. Nothing terrible. Just every couple of days, right before breakfast. Then one morning, beginning of my fourth month, nothing. It just went away.

HELEN

Mm, you're lucky. I puked three times a day for seven months straight with Mary.

APRIL

Mary.

HELEN

Mm. Boy or girl?

APRIL

I don't know.

HELEN

Couldn't they tell? Or didn't you want to ruin the surprise?

APRIL

They asked. I suppose that means they could tell.

HELEN

Mm, you'd be surprised. I suspect a lot of it is "This here could be his penis or her pinky. No promises."

APRIL

Well.

HELEN

So, didn't you want to find out?

APRIL

Not really, I didn't, no.

HELEN

Mm. Carrying high is usually a girl.

APRIL

My mother always said carrying high is a sure sign of boys.

HELEN

No, boys are low.

APRIL

Which were you?

HELEN

Mary was high, but my oldest was a bit of both.

APRIL
Boy or girl?

HELEN
Mm, boy. There.

APRIL
Where?

HELEN
There. On the swings. Not so high, sweetheart...

APRIL
...what's his name?

HELEN
Gabriel. Seemed like a good idea at the time. Now it's
utterly ironic, believe me. He's a devil.

APRIL
He looks very sweet.

HELEN
They always do when they're not yours.

*The boy jumps from the swings and sprawls face-
first in the sand.*

HELEN
Completely fearless.

*The boy hops up and, grinning through a mask
of sand, spits, checks to make sure his mother
saw, and gets back on the swings again.*

HELEN
Little monster.

APRIL
How old is he?

HELEN
Ten going on thirty. Do you have any names picked out?

APRIL

Not really. I think I'll wait and see who it is, see what name fits.

HELEN

Mm. Which do you think? Boy or girl?

APRIL

I don't know. Sometimes I feel one way, sometimes...

HELEN

...which do you want?

APRIL

Don't see how it matters, actually, what I want. It's going to be whatever it's going to be.

HELEN

No preference?

APRIL

Sometimes I think a little girl would be sweet. Tea parties and Easter dresses and a doll house on Christmas morning...

HELEN

...mm...

APRIL

...and then I see a little boy in a shop or on the street, with their little shoes and serious faces, all grumpy, slouching about like little men, and my heart kind of goes "Oh..." You know?

HELEN

Mm.

APRIL

But I say, as long as it's healthy – he, she, whatever – long as they've got all their fingers and toes, it doesn't matter.

HELEN

Absolutely right. My name's Helen.

APRIL

April.

They turn back to watch the children for a moment.

HELEN

Mm, you're right, you know. Doesn't matter what they are, so long as they're alright. I lost my first, actually. Twelve years ago. Before Gabriel. Premature, bad heart. Didn't even get to hold him. Got one glimpse and then they just wooshed him off to an incubator. Never brought him back.

APRIL

How awful.

HELEN

Oh, I'm sorry. I shouldn't be telling you that. Last thing you need to hear...

APRIL

...no, it's fine. I'm not worried. It's fine, really...

HELEN

...mm, always hated that, everyone telling you their horror stories and if they don't say "Aren't you scared?" Then they say "Isn't it exciting?" And you just want to strangle them. Drove me crazy, with my first, all the attention and questions and advice and . . . oh, I'm sorry.

APRIL

It's fine, really.

HELEN

Well.

APRIL

I've thought about that, though. Something going wrong. I suppose it can't be helped, worrying.

HELEN

You shouldn't, shouldn't worry. It almost scared me off for good, but, well, it worked out. Mary and Gabriel.

APRIL

Mary and Gabriel.

HELEN

Mm, that's what you get with sixteen years of Catholic school. Mary, Gabriel, and Stephen. Pick a saint, any saint.

APRIL

Stephen?

HELEN

Stephen was my first.

APRIL

Ah.

HELEN

Don't worry.

APRIL

I don't, really. They say everything is fine, but . . . sometimes, some nights I get into bed and I realize that I can't remember the last time I felt a kick or, well, anything, and well, I just lie there and wait for it. A shift, some movement, anything to let me know everything's okay. And it always comes. I'm half asleep and they kick me to wake me up.

HELEN

Get used to it.

APRIL

Sometimes I think I'm being teased.

HELEN

You think it's bad now, wait until later. When they really learn how to wind you up. You've no idea.

APRIL

I'm sure I'll find out.

HELEN

You will, don't worry. The thing I dread right now is high school. In a few years, demonspawn over there will start dating. I shudder to think about setting him loose on young, impressionable girls. Talk about being teased. He's going to be a heartbreaker, I just know it.

APRIL

You know, did you ever . . . when you were pregnant, did you ever..?

HELEN

...mm?

APRIL

It's the strangest thing, being pregnant. Like your bones, like you can feel your bones expanding.

HELEN

How do you mean?

APRIL

Well, the past few days, past few days I've been doing something, I don't know. The other day, I was folding laundry and all of a sudden my hips begin to hurt, to ache, and I said "That's odd." I bent down to pick something up and, I swear, all of a sudden, it, it, it was like my hip bones suddenly shifted, like they just slid about three inches apart. I mean, I know it wasn't that much, but I felt it. It felt like it. It's almost as if women have this ability to expand, to come apart.

HELEN

If we didn't, we'd never survive labor.

APRIL

Did you ever have that?

HELEN

Mm, I didn't, no. But being pregnant's strange, different for everyone. I know a few women who just love it, being pregnant. Not labor, of course. They just revel in it, the feeling of being pregnant...

APRIL

...oh, God...

HELEN

...they do. But I've never got used to it. And now I'm finished with it, thank God.

APRIL

You are?

HELEN

Mm, absolutely. Two's plenty. My husband jokes sometimes that all we need is one more and we'll have one of each. Boy, girl, hermaphrodite.

APRIL

That's awful.

HELEN

He is awful. Look what he's set loose on the world. What about your husband?

APRIL

My husband.

HELEN

Mm, he holding out for a boy or a girl?

APRIL

I don't know what he wants. He isn't my husband. He didn't want a baby at all, so . . . so he didn't want me either, once I told him. No promises.

HELEN

I'm sorry.

APRIL

Don't be. It was months ago. So long as we have all our fingers and toes, everything will be fine.

HELEN

I'm sorry. I should leave well enough alone.

APRIL

No, really...

HELEN

...mm, I'm just nosy. Like the shoes and jackets and flowers. Looking for clues.

APRIL

Clues?

HELEN

No wedding ring. No offense.

APRIL

None taken. You're not the first to notice, believe me.

HELEN

I'm sorry. Didn't mean to put you on the spot like that.

APRIL

You didn't. Don't worry. I'll be alright.

HELEN

I'm sure you will.

APRIL

I mean, I am a little . . . I mean, I don't mind you asking. Most people don't, really. They don't ask, but they talk, they look at you, they drop their voices when you walk past. And I don't like pain. I'm not looking forward to that part of it all...

HELEN

...no one does. You'll be fine. It's a snap. Really.

APRIL

I know, but it's still a bit scary. How long were you in..?

*...from the playground, Gabriel begins to
scream...*

HELEN

...hang on...

APRIL

...in, what's..?

...but Helen's is up and trotting out to where her son is hysterically slapping at his hands and screaming.

HELEN

What, what is it? What's wrong, what is it, sweetheart?

He's entirely incoherent, screaming and crying and shaking his hands.

HELEN

What is it? What's wrong?

GABRIEL

My hand, my hand...

HELEN

...what's wrong..?

GABRIEL

...my hand, my...

HELEN

...show...

GABRIEL

...hand, my hand...

HELEN

...show me...

GABRIEL

...my hand...

HELEN

...what happened..?

GABRIEL

...it hurts, it hurts, it hurts...

...she takes his hands and looks them over.

HELEN

I don't see anything...

GABRIEL
...my hand...

HELEN
...I don't see anything...

GABRIEL
...it hurts...

HELEN
...what hurts, where..?

GABRIEL
...my hand...

HELEN
...which one hurts, which hand..?

GABRIEL
...it hurts....

HELEN
...did you smash it?

GABRIEL
No, it hurts...

HELEN
...I know it hurts, sweetheart. Tell me what happened.

GABRIEL
...it, no, this one, a bee, a bee stung my hand...

HELEN
...oh, sweetheart. Show me where.

GABRIEL
Here, on my hand. This one.

HELEN
Where, which one? Where did it sting you?

He holds out one hand for her inspection.

GABRIEL

He stung me.

HELEN

Mm, he sure did. Come on.

She leads him back over to the bench.

HELEN

Here we go...

...she inspects the back of his hand, plucking at it.

HELEN

Alright sweetheart, look at this. See this? This is the stinger. See, right here? It's out now. I got it out.

GABRIEL

It still hurts.

HELEN

I know it does, sweetheart, hold on...

...she rummages in her handbag.

APRIL

Do you, do you need..?

HELEN

...no, no, we're fine, thanks. Another minor playground tragedy...

...she finds a pack of cigarettes and gets one out...

HELEN

...just a bee sting...

...she crushes the cigarette between her fingers and smears the tobacco on Gabriel's hand.

HELEN

Alright, sweetheart, listen, let me put this on your hand, alright?

GABRIEL

What is it?

HELEN

It'll make your hand feel better, alright? It'll make it go away.

GABRIEL

What is it?

HELEN

One of mommy's cigarettes, sweetheart. It'll make you feel better, See, look, here, I'm putting it on the place where the bee stung you. Now, you press down like this for me, okay? Can you hold this here for me?

GABRIEL

Uh huh.

HELEN

Come on, come sit by me for a minute and hold that on your hand, alright?

GABRIEL

Still hurts.

HELEN

I know it does, sweetheart, but let's just sit here for a minute and wait. Alright? Alright?

GABRIEL

Alright.

They sit for a moment, watching the other children.

HELEN

How you doing, tough guy?

GABRIEL

Alright.

HELEN

How's that hand doing? Feel better? You want to go play some more?

Gabriel shakes his head.

HELEN

Alright. Sit here for a little bit longer?

He shakes his head.

She squeezes his shoulder.

Silence, but for the children.

Helen catches April's eye over the top of Gabriel's head and gives her a smile.

HELEN

It's not as hard as it looks.

APRIL

God, I hope not. I'm impressed.

HELEN

Don't be. It's a mother's trick. You pick them up as you go along. Sometimes you just make something up. But no matter how much you do, there's always an accident waiting, always some child-size tragedy you can't plan for or protect against. That's how it is. That's what it's like. Don't worry. You'll figure your way through, same as everyone.

She holds up Gabriel's hand.

HELEN

Let me see. Feel better?

GABRIEL

A little.

HELEN

Just a little? You want to go play some more?

GABRIEL

No.

HELEN

You ready to go?

GABRIEL

Uh huh.

HELEN

Alright, sweetheart. Let's collect your sister. Mary, time to go...

...on the playground, Mary ignores her.

HELEN

Mary.

MARY

Mom...

HELEN

Now.

Mary stomps over to the bench.

APRIL

I am impressed.

HELEN

It's all in the voice. Alright, sweethearts. Get your coats.

*She helps the children struggle into
windbreakers.*

HELEN

Good talking with you. Sorry again about the horror stories.

APRIL

Don't be. I've heard worse.

HELEN

You'll be fine. Good luck to you, April.

APRIL

Thanks. It was nice talking with you.

HELEN

Mm, see you around I hope. We come here quite a bit. It's a safe place to play.

APRIL

I suppose it is.

HELEN

Except for the bees. Come on sweethearts. Well, Goodbye.

APRIL

Bye.

Helen and the two children leave.

April looks to the playground where a few children are still playing.

The boy in the red sweater is still there, digging in the sand. He moves from spot to spot, scooping out holes. Once he has gone down a foot or so, he moves on to a fresh spot. And then another.

There is a kind of quiet purposefulness to all of this; the playground is dotted with a number of holes.

Long silence, but for the children.

He glances over at April, looks away.

Pause.

He moves to a new spot and starts a new hole.

After a moment, April goes over to him and squats down.

APRIL

Hello.

The boy nods to her.

APRIL

Do you need any help? Did you lose something?

RED BOY

No ma'am.

APRIL
What are you digging for? Treasure?

RED BOY
Bones.

APRIL
Bones? Eeew.

RED BOY
Do you want to help me?

APRIL
Sure . . . um, where should I start?

RED BOY
Over there, maybe.

APRIL
Here? Over here?

RED BOY
That'll work.

She sits down and begins to dig.

The boy watches her for a moment.

APRIL
Am I doing it right?

RED BOY
You've got to push the sand out this way, so it doesn't go back in again like that. Like this.

APRIL
How's this? Better?

RED BOY
Sort of, yes ma'am.

APRIL
You're very polite. What's your name..?

RED BOY
...are you going to get a baby?

APRIL
Uh huh, I am.

RED BOY
When?

APRIL
Oh . . . soon.

RED BOY
When?

APRIL
Summertime.

RED BOY
When?

APRIL
June, I think.

RED BOY
What day?

APRIL
Actually, I don't know what day.

RED BOY
"Thirty days hath September, April, June, and November."

APRIL
That's right.

RED BOY
I can count to thirty.

APRIL
Can you?

*He begins to dig again, tossing out a handful
of sand for each number...*

RED BOY

...one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, eighteen . . . eighteen, nineteen, twenty, twenty-one, twenty-two, twenty-three, twenty-four, twenty-five, twenty-six, twenty-seven, twenty-eight, twenty-nine, thirty.

APRIL

Very good.

RED BOY

I can do more. It's just adding one, and one again, over and over. It's easy. I can count for a long time.

He digs for a moment.

RED BOY

Two.

APRIL

What?

RED BOY

His birthday's on two. I think. The day.

APRIL

Who?

RED BOY

Your baby.

APRIL

Oh, really?

RED BOY

Yes ma'am.

APRIL

You think it's going to be a boy?

RED BOY

He is a boy.

APRIL

Well, maybe he is and maybe he isn't.

RED BOY

He is.

APRIL

You know, even doctors don't know for sure. They have to guess.

RED BOY

When you have him, when he's born, will you bring him back to play with me?

APRIL

Well, he'll be a little baby at first.

RED BOY

But when he's bigger? Will you bring him to see me? Can he come help me dig?

APRIL

Well, what if he's not a boy? What if he turns out to be a little girl?

He doesn't answer.

APRIL

Well, you might be right. Tell you what, promise me something . If you're right, if he turns out to be a boy...

RED BOY

...he is a boy.

APRIL

Well, if he is, I'll bring him back to play when he's big enough.

RED BOY

But not when he's a baby, because babies can't dig.

APRIL

No. Not much, they can't.

RED BOY

Nope.

*He resumes digging and, after a moment,
whispers something softly under his breath.*

APRIL

I'm sorry? What did you say?

RED BOY

We can dig. Me and Jimmy.

APRIL

Jimmy?

RED BOY

Pardon?

APRIL

Who's Jimmy?

RED BOY

The baby.

APRIL

You think his name is Jimmy?

RED BOY

Yes ma'am.

APRIL

How do you know that's his name?

RED BOY

It just is.

Pause.

She stands up, stretching.

He looks up at her.

Long silence.

RED BOY
Are you leaving now?

APRIL
I have to. Are you ready to leave?

RED BOY
No ma'am.

APRIL
No?

RED BOY
Not yet.

APRIL
Shouldn't you go home?

RED BOY
Not yet.

APRIL
Well . . . well, all the other kids are gone.

*The boy stops digging and looks around at the
empty playground.*

Long pause.

He resumes digging.

APRIL
Won't you get scared, being by yourself?

RED BOY
No ma'am.

APRIL
Look, I don't think it's a good idea for you to be here all
alone. It's not safe.

RED BOY
I'm here all the time by myself.

APRIL

Alright, then.

*She goes to the edge of the sand, steps over
the ring and out onto the grass.*

*The boy gets up and goes to the edge, stopping
just inside the border.*

RED BOY

Goodbye.

APRIL

Bye. Thanks for letting me dig with you.

RED BOY

Thank you for helping me.

APRIL

I'm sorry we didn't find any bones.

RED BOY

I'll keep looking.

APRIL

Look, are you sure you're not supposed to be getting home?

RED BOY

No ma'am. I can't leave. Not yet. Not until I find all my bones.

APRIL

Won't your mother, won't your mom be worried?

RED BOY

She knows where I am.

APRIL

You should go home, though. Eat lunch.

RED BOY

I can't leave.

APRIL

Now listen, promise me you'll go home, when you find some?
You can show, I bet your mother, I bet she would like to see
them.

RED BOY

Maybe.

APRIL

Promise?

RED BOY

I promise.

APRIL

Alright, then. I'll see you later.

RED BOY

When you bring Jimmy, when he's bigger?

APRIL

I suppose.

RED BOY

Promise.

APRIL

I promise. Be careful.

RED BOY

Yes ma'am.

APRIL

See you.

RED BOY

Goodbye.

She leaves.

*He goes back to a fresh spot in the sand, and
starts to dig. Under his breath, he begins to
count the handfuls of dirt...*

RED BOY

...five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve,
thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen...

*...the lights fade completely, but the counting
continues on, carrying us over and into the
next scene.*

Act II: Summer

*In the darkness, we hear a child's voice,
counting...*

VOICE

*...seventeen, eighteen, nineteen, twenty, twenty-one,
twenty-two, twenty-three, twenty-four, twenty-five, twenty-
six, twenty-seven, twenty-eight, twenty-nine, thirty...*

*...the lights rise on a warm summer afternoon
at the playground.*

*Adam stands with his hands over his eyes,
counting...*

ADAM

*...thirty-one, thirty-two, thirty-three, thirty-four,
thirty-five, thirty-six, thirty-seven...*

...unseen, another boy, calls out...

JIMMY

...quit peeking...

*...another voice rings out from a different
part of the playground...*

MICHAEL

...cheater...

...Adam drops his hands and yells back.

ADAM

I'm not cheating...

JIMMY

...hey...

MICHAEL

...hey, cover your eyes...

...Adam covers his eyes again...

ADAM

...thirty-seven, thirty-eight, thirty-nine...

MICHAEL

...start over...

ADAM

...what?

MICHAEL

You got to start over.

ADAM

No way...

JIMMY

...for cheating, you got to count over again.

ADAM

I'm not cheating.

MICHAEL

But now you know where we are. You got to start over so we can hide again.

JIMMY

Come on, start over.

ADAM

No way.

MICHAEL

Cheater.

JIMMY

Come on.

Adam covers up his eyes again...

ADAM

...one, two, three, five, six...

*...while he is counting, the two other boys
come out of their hiding places and run around
to find new ones...*

ADAM
...seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen,
fourteen...

MICHAEL
...hey...

JIMMY
...hey, slow down...

ADAM
...fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, nineteen...

MICHAEL
...hey...

...Adam uncovers his eyes.

ADAM
What?

JIMMY
Hey...

MICHAEL
...hey, cover your eyes.

Adam covers his eyes.

ADAM
What?

JIMMY
You're going too fast.

ADAM
What?

MICHAEL
You can't count so fast. We got to find new places.

ADAM
Jeez.

JIMMY

Come on, come on...

MICHAEL

...and don't peek.

Adam drops his hands again.

ADAM

Jeez, I wasn't...

JIMMY

...hey!

Adam covers his eyes again.

ADAM

Sorry. Jeez. Sorry.

He continues to count and the other boys run off to hide.

Michael goes to the stand of trees behind the swings and crouches down.

Jimmy wiggles into the sand, trying to bury himself.

Time's up. Adam opens his eyes.

Jimmy, half-in and half-out of the sand, freezes.

ADAM

Apple, peaches, pumpkin pie. Whoever's not ready, holler Aye...

...silence.

ADAM

Ready or not, here I come.

He uncovers his eyes.

Jimmy freezes, half-buried in the sand.

Adam hunts around on the opposite side of the playground.

ADAM

Here!

MICHAEL

Jesus...

...the two of them confer silently for a moment, splitting up to search for Jimmy.

ADAM

Here he is...

...he is at the crawlspaces and pulls someone out by the leg. It is not Jimmy that he has found, but the boy in the red sweater.

Adam drops the boy's leg...

ADAM

...sorry, man.

MICHAEL

Sorry.

ADAM

Sorry.

The boy turns and crawls back into the tube.

Michael and Adam share a look and move off to look some more, but they've lost their enthusiasm for the game.

MICHAEL

Alright, alright, we're done now...

ADAM

...we give up.

MICHAEL

Come out, come out wherever you are!

Silence.

ADAM

Jimmy!

MICHAEL

Hey..!

ADAM

You think he left?

MICHAEL

Nah, he's just being a...

ADAM

...Jimmy..!

MICHAEL

...come on out...

...silence.

MICHAEL

We're leaving...

*...they stand for a moment, just a few feet
away from where Jimmy is.*

Silence.

MICHAEL

Come on.

He and Adam move to leave.

*With a hollow laugh, Jimmy rises up out of the
sand in front of them.*

ADAM

Jeez...

MICHAEL

...holy shit...

...Jimmy is laughing...

JIMMY

...oh, God...

MICHAEL

...you asshole...

JIMMY

...oh, that was classic...

ADAM

...shut up...

JIMMY

...oh jeez, oh man...

MICHAEL

...you...

...he pushes Jimmy down...

JIMMY

...hey...

MICHAEL

...you asshole...

...Jimmy gets back up and shoves Michael...

JIMMY

...what're you doing..?

Michael shoves him back.

ADAM

Hey...

*...he grabs at Michael and they tussle, falling
to the ground...*

MICHAEL

...get off of me, you...

ADAM

...guys...

...they roll, wrestling and growling...

ADAM

...Jimmy...

...Michael has pinned Jimmy, sitting on his chest and holding his arms down with his knees.

Jimmy lies there, bucking under him, helpless.

JIMMY

Get off of me...

MICHAEL

...knock it off...

JIMMY

...come on...

MICHAEL

...calm down...

JIMMY

...get off...

MICHAEL

...not letting you up until you calm down...

...Jimmy screams at him...

MICHAEL

...I said shut up...

ADAM

...Michael...

...Jimmy screams again...

MICHAEL

Jimmy, Jimmy? If you don't calm down...

JIMMY

...fuck you...

MICHAEL

...you don't knock it off, I'm going to bust...

JIMMY

...just try it you...

MICHAEL

...you asked for it...

...Michael raises his fist and holds it there...

ADAM

...Michael...

Pause.

Jimmy screams.

Michael hits him across the face. Jimmy rolls away with his face in his hands. Michael gets up, dusting his knees off.

MICHAEL

I warned you...

...Jimmy rolls over on his side, his face in his hands. He staggers to his feet, face and hands smeared with blood.

JIMMY

...you hit me, you fucking, you hit me.

MICHAEL

No shit Dick Tracy, what was your first clue..?

ADAM

...hey, come on...

JIMMY

...shit, look at this, look at me...

MICHAEL
...why don't you go cry about it to your mommy..?

ADAM
...shut up, Michael...

MICHAEL
...Jesus...

ADAM
...you alright?

JIMMY
Get the fuck away from me...

ADAM
...hey...

JIMMY
...fuck off, both of you, go to hell.

ADAM
What're you pushing me for? Look at my shirt...

JIMMY
...fuck you...

...Adam slugs him in the stomach. Jimmy crumples.

MICHAEL
Come on.

ADAM
Yeah...

...they leave Jimmy lying there, crying.

After the boys are gone, the boy in the red sweater comes out of the crawlspace.

Pause.

Jimmy looks up at him.

JIMMY
What? What?

RED BOY
Are you all right?

JIMMY
I guess.

RED BOY
You're bleeding.

JIMMY
No shit, Dick Tracy...

*...he takes his shirt off and tries to wipe the
blood off his face.*

JIMMY
I get it all?

The boy shakes his head.

JIMMY
Shit...

...he scrubs his face again.

JIMMY
How about now?

The boy shakes his head again.

JIMMY
Jesus, I give up.

*He bunches up his shirt and holds it under his
nose.*

He sits there, looking at the ground.

The boy does not move.

Finally, Jimmy looks up again.

JIMMY
What're you doing here?

RED BOY
Digging.

JIMMY
For what?

The boy puts his hand in his pocket and holds something out to Jimmy.

RED BOY
Bones.

Jimmy takes it from him, turning it over in his fingers.

JIMMY
Cool.

RED BOY
It's a rib...

...he touches the left side of his body...

RED BOY
...from here. Do you want to help me dig?

JIMMY
I know what it is.

He puts his shirt back on and gets up.

JIMMY
Where should I start?

The red boy points to the swing sets.

RED BOY
Over there.

JIMMY
Gotcha...

...he goes over and starts to dig, throwing up handful after handful of sand.

The boy watches him for a moment, then he kneels down and starts to dig with the careful, meticulous method we have seen before.

They dig for awhile, the two of them.

After a time, Jimmy slows down and eventually stops, watching the boy scoop out a few handfuls and then move on from spot to spot.

JIMMY

Hey..?

...silence.

JIMMY

Hey, can I see that bone again?

The boy in the red sweater comes over.

JIMMY

Aren't you hot in that?

RED BOY

No.

JIMMY

Man, I'm sweating like a monkey.

The boy holds the bone out and Jimmy takes it from him, turning it over in his hands.

JIMMY

Where'd you find this? Here?

RED BOY

I found that one over there, under the swings.

JIMMY

Got any more?

The boy digs in his pockets, handing them over to Jimmy one at a time.

RED BOY

This one's a finger, or part of a finger. It got broken. This is another rib, lower down. I don't know what this is. This is one of my teeth, a back one...

...Jimmy looks through the collection.

JIMMY

You think there's any more?

The other boy nods.

Jimmy hands them back and starts digging again. The other boy stands there holding the bones cupped in his hands.

JIMMY

You know, did you know that babies are born with something like two hundred and fifteen bones, but grown ups only have two hundred and six bones. Some of them, some of the bones grow together when we get older. Like in your skull, you start off with four or five of these bones and after a while they kind of melt together into one big thing, and that's your skull. Women have one more rib than men, because Adam and Eve. You know?

The boy does not answer.

JIMMY

Because, when God made Adam he put him to sleep and took his rib out and made it into a woman, into Eve. So that's why women have one more rib than men. So women are made out of bone. But men are made out of dust, which I guess means that women are too. But that's why that when you die and they bury you, your body turns to dust.

RED BOY

Except for the bones.

JIMMY

No, I think your bones'll turn to dust too, if you wait long enough.

Pause.

JIMMY

What?

RED BOY

Two hundred is a lot.

JIMMY

Yeah.

RED BOY

I only have these. I don't think I can find the rest of them before they turn to dust.

JIMMY

How long did it take you to find those?

RED BOY

I've been digging a long time.

JIMMY

Let me see them again? You think there's more around here?

RED BOY

I know there are.

JIMMY

Where'd they come from?

RED BOY

They came from a boy. Somebody, somebody caught him here. It was almost night time and no one else was around and the boy was swinging by himself and all of a sudden there was a man there and he grabbed him, he grabbed the boy and pulled him down and hit him and hurt him and burned his skin with cigarettes and, and, and, and he hurt him some more and then he choked him and stabbed him in the heart and took his body back in the trees and cut it up and ate part of it and buried the bones all over the place so no one would find out what had happened, so no one would find the body and catch him

Silence.

JIMMY

What happened to the man.

RED BOY

I don't know.

JIMMY

What's this one again?

RED BOY

It's a finger.

JIMMY

Doesn't look like a finger.

RED BOY

It is.

JIMMY

It's too short.

RED BOY

It's the middle piece, from here...

*...he shows Jimmy the space between the first
and second knuckle of his index finger...*

RED BOY

...from right here.

JIMMY

It's too short.

RED BOY

It broke, it got broken when he pulled me off the swing and my hand got stuck in the chain and, and it got all twisted up and the man pulled, and it broke, I heard it break before I felt it and I, I, I, and I started to cry and he put his hand over my mouth. His fingers smelled like cigarettes and his breath was hot and he was talking but I couldn't understand what he was saying, he was talking so fast, and then he was hurting me and he wouldn't stop and he had his hand in his pocket and...

...Jimmy thrusts the bones back into the boy's hands....

JIMMY

...stop it, Jesus, stop..!

...one of the bones falls to the ground.

Pause.

The boy in the red sweater picks it up and dusts it off.

RED BOY

This, this was my rib. This one, from right here, under my heart. See this? That's from the knife when he stuck it in and the blood came out and he tried to pull it out but it was stuck and it caught for a second and he couldn't get it out again and he said a bad word and twisted it and pulled it out and it left this scrape here on my rib and then the blood came out, more blood and I died and then...

...Jimmy has risen and is backing away from the boy...

JIMMY

...Jesus, shut up...

RED BOY

...and now I can't go home...

JIMMY

...shut the fuck up...

RED BOY

...and now I can't leave, I can't get out until I find my bones again...

...Jimmy stumbles. He rests there for a moment, on his hands and knees, breathing heavily.

RED BOY

I'm sorry...

JIMMY

...oh God...

RED BOY

... I'm sorry...

JIMMY

...get away...

...he gets to his feet...

RED BOY

...Jimmy...?

JIMMY

...get away from me...

...he runs off.

The boy in the red sweater calls after him.

RED BOY

...Jimmy . . . Jimmy . . . Jimmy...

*...the lights fall as he continues to call, his
voice echoing in the dark between this scene
and the next.*

Act III: Autumn

In the darkness, we hear a voice calling...

VOICE

...Jimmy, Jimmy, Jimmy, Jimmy, Jimmy...

...the lights rise on the playground, early evening.

Things have changed. It is cleaner, newer. There is a fresh coat of paint on the crawlspaces and the monkey bars. The slide has been replaced. Gone is the old, rusted metal chute. In its place is a brightly colored plastic tube.

The calling continues from offstage, coming closer...

VOICE

...Jimmy, Jimmy, Jimmy, Jimmy...

...a young girl in her late teens enters. She is pretty, perhaps seventeen or eighteen. Dressed in black with wild hair and heavily made-up eyes and lips...

KELLY

...Jimmy? Jimmy?

She wanders through the playground, sets the swings squealing on their rusty chains, climbs the slide. She stands for a moment at the top, looking down.

KELLY

Jimmy, this isn't funny. I know you're here. If you don't come out by the time I get to the bottom, I'm leaving.

She slides, feet first, into the tube.

Almost immediately from within there is a muffled scream and a boy's voice, laughing like a ghoul in a horror movie.

*There is a frantic sound of pounding from
midway within the tube.*

Silence.

*Then, we hear the sound of someone sliding
through the tube.*

Two pairs of feet emerge slowly, intertwined.

*There is a murmuring from within the tube.
The feet move against one another. The motion
continues and the feet slide out further,
revealing legs.*

*After another round of murmuring and movement,
Kelly scoots quickly and neatly out of the
tube, humming. She hikes her skirt down and
adjusts her hair.*

The other pair of feet – Jimmy's – do not move.

Kelly walks over to the tube.

KELLY

Get up.

Jimmy does not move.

She kicks his feet.

JIMMY

Hey...

KELLY

...come on.

He doesn't move.

*She goes to the opening of the tube and reaches
in.*

KELLY

Trick or treat..?

...Jimmy's hands shoot out of the tube and grab her. She gives a half-scream, half-laugh, allowing herself to be pulled back in.

They lie there, making soft noises and murmuring. We can see his hands on her legs, moving up. Each time they get close to the hem her skirt, Kelly's hands come into view and push them gently back down.

Abruptly, she hops quickly out of the tube. Jimmy groans within. She rises, brushing herself off.

KELLY

Come on...

JIMMY

...no...

...she kicks her boot against the side of the tube, hard.

JIMMY

Jesus...

...he scrambles out.

JIMMY

What?

KELLY

When you said you had a friend to show me, I thought you meant something else.

JIMMY

Jesus...

He untucks his shirt and reaches for her, but she twists out of his arms and dances away to the bench, sitting down.

KELLY

No, no, no. You don't get your treat without showing me your trick.

JIMMY

I thought it was that if you don't give me a treat, then I get to play a trick.

He comes close and sits down next to her.

She scoots away.

KELLY

New rules.

He moves closer. Puts his hand on the back of her neck.

JIMMY

So, no treat?

KELLY

You already had your treat.

JIMMY

Just a taste.

KELLY

You should save the rest for later.

JIMMY

I want it now.

KELLY

You'll spoil your dinner.

JIMMY

No I won't...

...she kisses him quiet.

Sitting there, on the bench, his attentions increase and she responds in earnest.

JIMMY

I love you.

KELLY

I love you too, baby.

She moves her head to one side and he buries his face in her throat, his hands roaming.

KELLY

Mm...

...she opens her eyes to see the boy in the red sweater, watching them...

KELLY

...oh, my god...

JIMMY

...oh, baby...

KELLY

...get off of me, you bastard.

JIMMY

Don't call me...

He sees the boy, facing them.

Long silence.

JIMMY

Hey.

RED BOY

Hi, Jimmy.

KELLY

Is this him?

Jimmy shoots her a look.

KELLY

What?

JIMMY

I brought somebody to meet you. Okay?

Pause.

The boy in the red sweater turns and begins digging at a spot in the sand on the other side of the playground.

KELLY

Is that him? That's him? It's just some kid.

JIMMY

I told you that.

KELLY

You told me he was a...

...Jimmy puts his hand up to her mouth. Shakes his head.

JIMMY

He is. He is.

She sits for a moment, watching the boy. She gets up.

JIMMY

Wait...

KELLY

...shhh...

...she walks through the sand towards the boy, squats down next to him.

KELLY

Hey there, Caspar. Whatcha doing? Huh? You digging?

RED BOY

That's not my name.

KELLY

Ooh. Grumpiest ghost I know. Well, what is your name, then?

Silence.

KELLY

What are you digging for? Treasure? Jewels, maybe?
Catshit..?

JIMMY
...Jesus...

KELLY
...bones?

JIMMY
Kelly...

...the boy stops. Stares at the sand for a moment.

He looks back at Jimmy.

Silence.

He gets up.

KELLY
Hey, where you going...?

...she grabs his hand. He stops and turns to look at her.

She rises, holding onto his hand.

Long pause.

KELLY
Your hand's warm.

RED BOY
So is yours.

KELLY
You're a kid. You're, you're just a kid. He's only, he's only a kid. He's just a kid. Just. A. Little. Kid.

RED BOY
Don't touch me...

KELLY
...you told me, you know what he told me..?

RED BOY
...let go of me, please.

JIMMY

...Kelly...

KELLY

...you know what he said you were..?

JIMMY

...Kelly, Jesus, you promised you'd be cool...

KELLY

...shut the fuck up...

RED BOY

...I know...

KELLY

...you know what he said?

RED BOY

Yes.

KELLY

You, you know? Is it true? I want to hear you say it. Is.
It. True?

RED BOY

Yes.

KELLY

It's true. Right.

The boy is crying.

She shakes him again...

JIMMY

...Kelly...

*...she turns on him, dragging the boy with
her...*

KELLY

...you know, you drag me out here, I let feel me up a little – and wasn't that pleasant? – all because you told me some ghost story, and it turns out it's just some kid? Who is he, anyway? Who are you? Tell me? What's your name? Tell me.

She shakes him, but the boy in the red sweater stiffens his arm, pushing her back. Now he's holding her hand. He stares at her. Wipes his nose with his free hand and begins to speak, low and soft, rising with each passing word.

RED BOY

Your name, your name, your name, your name is Kelly . . . Green, Kelly Green . . . that's your name and you, and you, and you hate it, you hate your name because, because it's your name, it's your name but it's also a color, it's a color...

KELLY

...what are you...

RED BOY

...and your mother, your mother, she used to, she always used to make you wear it, she made you wear it when you were little, Kelly Green in kelly green...

KELLY

...knock it off...

RED BOY

...but you don't wear it, not anymore...

KELLY

...let go of me...

RED BOY

...and when you, and when you were little, you, someone, you were little and something bad, something very bad happened, it happened to you and now you, now you don't love, you can't love anyone and you won't, you never, you never will...

KELLY

....oh my God...

RED BOY

...but sometimes you think, you think about, you want to,
you think about making yourself dead...

KELLY

...Jimmy..?

RED BOY

...you're pretty and you're happy now but in, but in, in
one-two-three-four-five-six-seven-eight-nine-ten, in ten
years, in ten years you will wake up, you'll get up every
day, every day, and you go, you'll go to the mirror, scared,
scared of what you will see, scared of, scared of growing
old...

KELLY

...please...

RED BOY

...but you don't need, you don't need to worry because,
because, because you'll never grow old, Kelly Green...

JIMMY

...stop it...

RED BOY

...you'll never get old.

*He lets go of her hand. She falls back,
sobbing, into Jimmy's arms.*

*The boy stands there looking at them, tears
streaming down his cheeks.*

KELLY

Oh God, oh God...

...silence, but for the sound of her crying.

RED BOY

Jimmy.

JIMMY

Go away.

RED BOY
I'm sorry...

JIMMY
...just go.

RED BOY
I'm sorry...

JIMMY
...I know, look, just, just go, alright? Please?

RED BOY
Are you mad at me?

JIMMY
It's alright.

Long pause.

The boy in the red sweater runs off through the swings, setting them in motion as he passes. Then he is gone.

KELLY
Oh God...

JIMMY
...it's alright.

KELLY
Is he..?

JIMMY
...he's gone.

KELLY
What is this, what is this?

JIMMY
It was just a trick.

KELLY
A trick? God...

...she hits him on the chest...

KELLY

...you bastard...!

JIMMY

... don't, listen., it's alright, it's alright...

KELLY

...you scared the fucking shit out of me!

JIMMY

No, no he didn't, I didn't mean to, I was just playing a trick. I'm sorry. Come on, let's get back...

KELLY

...please, please, please just, just hold me. Okay? Jimmy?

Jimmy holds her close and she begins to cry softly again.

KELLY

God, please...

...she kisses him...

KELLY

...kiss me...

JIMMY

...Kelly...

KELLY

...please, just kiss me, please, hold me, please, hold me, please, I love you. Come on, I love you, please? I love you...

...the lights go to black and in the darkness we hear the sound of the swings, their chains creaking, rising to carry us over into the next scene.

Act IV: Winter

In the darkness, we hear the sound of the swings, their rusty chains creaking.

The lights rise on the playground, night.

The place is a shambles – splintered wood, obscene graffiti painted everywhere, rusted metal and crumbling concrete, faded and peeling paint, broken bottles, and trash everywhere.

This is no longer a safe place for children, if it ever was.

At rise, a man in his late thirties or early forties is pushing a boy on the one remaining swing. At every pass, the chains squeal and complain.

They are both bundled up – thick wool coats, boots, gloves and mittens, knit caps. There are small drifts of snow here and there, but the ground is mostly bare. It will snow later.

JIM

We should get going soon, buddy.

JAMES

What?

JIM

We need to start heading back.

JAMES

Not yet.

JIM

It's pretty cold.

JAMES

Not yet.

JIM

Your mom'll be looking for us. She'll get mad at me if I let you freeze into a popsicle.

JAMES

I won't freeze.

JIM

You might. Big ol' popsicle kid sitting on the couch watching cartoons, frozen like Walt Disney.

JAMES

Who?

JIM

Walt Disney. Disneyland. The guy who made up Mickey Mouse.

JAMES

He froze?

JIM

Some people say that before he died, he had doctors freeze him.

JAMES

Why?

JIM

So that his body would just stop and maybe one day they could wake him up again and make him better.

JAMES

Was he sick?

JIM

Uh huh.

JAMES

With what?

JIM

He had cancer.

JAMES

Did it work?

JIM

Well, last I heard he was still dead, so probably not.

JAMES

But would it work?

JIM

I don't think so. And besides, if you did get frozen and woken up later, everyone you knew would be dead. Everything would be different. You wouldn't know anyone anymore. You'd be all alone.

JAMES

Like a ghost.

JIM

Yeah. Except you'd still be alive. But lonely.

JAMES

But I wouldn't be sick anymore.

JIM

No. You wouldn't be sick.

Silence.

JAMES

It's cold.

He puts his feet down and drags them through the sand, stopping. He sits for a minute, looking at his feet.

JIM

You okay?

JAMES

Just thinking.

JIM

What're you thinking about?

JAMES

Just thinking.

JIM

You okay?

JAMES

Yeah.

Jim lights a cigarette. James makes a face.

JAMES

I thought you quit.

JIM

So did I.

JAMES

It's bad for you.

JIM

Yeah. Yes. It is.

JAMES

You'll get cancer and we'll have to freeze you like Walt Disney.

JIM

Who?

JAMES

Guy who made up Mickey Mouse.

JIM

Oh, yeah. Him.

JAMES

Mom quit.

James scrambles up the ladder to the slide.

JIM

Good for her. Careful up there.

JAMES

I'm alright.

JIM

Yeah, well, be careful anyway. We should get back.

JAMES

What about your friend?

JIM

I don't think he comes here anymore.

JAMES

Maybe he got tired of waiting.

JIM

Maybe.

JAMES

Maybe he's just late. Maybe he got lost.

JIM

Maybe.

JAMES

Or maybe his car broke down.

JIM

And maybe he had to walk to find a telephone.

JAMES

And maybe he got lost and fell into a hole.

JIM

And maybe the snow covered him up and he froze like Walt Disney.

JAMES

Who?

JIM

Guy who built Disneyland.

JAMES

Oh, yeah. Him.

JIM

Don't mock me, shorty.

JAMES

What's "mock" mean?

It means "make fun of."

Oh. Yeah.

"Oh. Yeah."

Don't mock me.

Come on, let's head back.

Not yet.

Silence.

How old is he?

Who, Walt Disney?

Your friend.

I don't know.

When's his birthday?

I don't know. A long time ago, I think.

Is he older than me?

Yes. No. Sort of. He's a kid.

JIM

JAMES

JIM

JAMES

JIM

JAMES

JAMES

JIM

JAMES

JIM

JAMES

JIM

JAMES

JIM

Jim stands for a moment at the foot of the slide, his hand on the dull-colored, splintered plastic tube.

JAMES

Whatcha doing?

JIM

Thinking.

JAMES

Whatcha thinking?

JIM

A girl. Girl I used to know, a long time ago.

JAMES

Who?

JIM

An old friend.

JAMES

Your girlfriend?

JIM

Before I met your mom. In high school.

JAMES

What was her name?

JIM

Doesn't matter.

JAMES

Is she still your girlfriend?

JIM

No. I don't have a girlfriend.

JAMES

Mom thinks you do.

JIM

Well, mom can . . . listen, your mom is mad at me. She doesn't understand...

...pause.

JIM

Listen buddy, I won't lie to you. Things happen to people. They change. You start off one way and then somehow you end up a completely different person. It's not your fault, it's not anything you did, but it happens and, it happens to everyone. Sometimes you change together, and sometimes you change different. When you're married, listen, you don't need to worry about any of this right now. Not for a long time.

JAMES

How long?

JIM

I don't know. Twenty years.

JAMES

How long is that?

JIM

It's a long time. Don't worry about it. A lot happens between now and then.

JAMES

Like what?

JIM

A lot.

JAMES

What happens?

JIM

You grow up. You lose all your teeth and get new ones. You make friends who move away. You learn to whistle and sing and pop wheelies on your bike. You go to school, and high school, and make more friends. You start smoking. You drink your first beer. You fall in love. You get your heart broken. You do it all over again. And again. You get a job. You get married. You get gray hair. You have kids. You quit smoking. Your kids get bigger. You change jobs. You make new friends. You start smoking again. You go bald, and it all changes you, little by little, until...

...he looks up at his son at the top of the slide. James is standing with his eyes closed, face lifted up, weaving slightly in the air.

JIM

What's wrong? James? You okay?

JAMES

Yes.

JIM

Are you okay?

JAMES

I am okay.

JIM

What are you doing?

JAMES

Smelling.

JIM

What are you doing?

JAMES

I'm smelling. The playground smells different at night.

JIM

That's snow, a cold snap. You can smell it coming.

JAMES

What's cold snap mean?

JIM

It means...

JAMES

...it is cold, you're right. I can smell it, the cold.

JIM

Maybe it's this?

JAMES

Uh, it's not cigarettes, Dad.

Oh. JIM

You should quit. JAMES

Yeah. JIM

They're bad for you. JAMES

That's what I hear. JIM

You could get that gum... JAMES

...come on, let's go back and make some hot chocolate. JIM

The real or the powder? JAMES

Real. JIM

Really? JAMES

Yes. JIM

Where'd you get it? JAMES

I bought it. JIM

Where'd you buy it? JAMES

From a store. JIM

Where'd they get it? JAMES

They bought it. JIM

From who? JAMES

From a farmer. JIM

Where did he get it? JAMES

From a chocolate cow. JIM

There's no such thing as a chocolate cow. JAMES

How do you know? JIM

I just know. JAMES

There isn't? JIM

No. JAMES

You sure? JIM

You know there isn't. JAMES

But I wish there was. JIM

Maybe it will come true since you wished for it. JAMES

JIM

I doubt it. My wishes don't usually come true.

JAMES

You mean like me getting better?

JIM

Like that, yeah.

Silence.

JAMES

I might, you know.

JIM

I know.

JAMES

Do you think I will?

JIM

I don't know. I want you to.

JAMES

Do you wish for it?

JIM

Every day.

JAMES

It might happen.

JIM

It might...

...he lights another cigarette.

JAMES

You're going to die before me if you don't quit. Sorry.

JIM

Come on down...

JAMES

...come on...

JIM
...I want you to meet someone.

JAMES
Who?

The boy in the red sweater is there.

JIM
Come on down and say hello.

James slides down the slide, pops out at the bottom almost on top of the other boy.

JAMES
Jeez...

JIM
Careful...

JAMES
...sorry.

Pause.

JIM
This is my friend I was telling you about.

JAMES
Hi.

RED BOY
Hi.

JIM
This is my son.

RED BOY
Hello.

JAMES
Hi.

JIM
I wasn't sure you'd still be here.

Pause.

JIM

Are you still digging?

RED BOY

Yes.

JIM

I thought maybe you'd found...

JAMES

...Dad?

JIM

Yeah buddy?

James gestures to him and Jim bends down. He cups his hands at his father's ear and whispers into it.

JIM

You can ask him.

James shakes his head.

JIM

He wants to know aren't you cold?

RED BOY

No.

James pulls his dad down and whispers again.

JIM

Ask him yourself, you want to know.

Pause.

JIM

He wants to know your name.

Long silence.

The boy in the red sweater is about to speak, but he looks back over his shoulder for a moment and turns back to the other two as a wash of light spills over the playground. There is the rev of an car engine, a door slams, and a woman's voice calls out...

JOYCE

...James...

JAMES

...it's mom.

JIM

I know.

A woman comes into the playground from the direction of the headlights. She is pretty but with a strained look about her eyes and mouth. Like James and Jim, she is dressed warmly against the winter cold. By the time she gets to them, the boy in the red sweater has gone.

JAMES

Hi mom.

JOYCE

Go get in the car.

JAMES

Mom...

JOYCE

James. It's time to go.

JIM

Go on, buddy. Here, give me a hug first.

He kneels down and embraces the boy.

James pulls back and slides his father's knit cap off. Jim's head is completely shaved.

JIM

What are you doing?

James takes his fingertip and traces on his father's forehead.

JIM

What are you doing?

James steps back and looks at his father's face for a moment. Then he comes in close and whispers something before running off into the light.

Jim and Joyce watch him go.

There is the sound of a car door slamming.

JOYCE

Uh, what the hell is wrong with you? You can't bring him out into the middle of winter.

JIM

He wanted to.

JOYCE

He's sick.

JIM

He wanted to.

JOYCE

Do you do everything he wants?

JIM

Yes. I do.

He lights another cigarette.

There is the sound of a car horn.

JOYCE

What's he doing?

Silence.

Jim puts his cap back on.

JOYCE

What did you do to your hair?

JIM

I cut it.

JOYCE

Is this some sick joke to you? You think this is funny? How do you think he feels?

JIM

He went with me. The other kids were making fun of him because of his hair. He told me last week. I went to pick him up early yesterday, and we went to Jerry's. I told him that I wouldn't let anyone make fun of him. If they make fun of him, they have to make fun of me. So, after school, I stood outside with him with our caps in our hands, and I looked every single one of those little fuckers in the eye as they came out. Not one of them laughed.

JOYCE

You picked him up early? You, you took him out of school early, without my permission?

JIM

You're missing the point.

He stubs out his cigarette.

JOYCE

He's in school, Jim. Uh, you don't drag him out to...

JIM

...I didn't drag him...

JOYCE

...no, no, no, you can't do this anymore. This won't, I'm calling Martin's office on Monday morning and...

JIM

...you know what? You know what? Call him. Go ahead...

...he lights another cigarette.

The car horn honks again.

JOYCE

What the hell is he doing?

JIM

He wants me to put this out.

JOYCE

You should.

JIM

Mm.

JOYCE

I quit.

JIM

Good for you.

JOYCE

You should too.

JIM

Yeah, well, that's what it says on the pack.

JOYCE

You shouldn't smoke around him. It's bad for him.

JIM

What, is he going to get cancer and die?

JOYCE

You know, sometimes I wonder how you get through life.

JIM

You and me both.

JOYCE

There's something wrong with you, something broken.

JIM

Hey, you know, everybody's broken.

JOYCE

You're sick. You're ill. Mentally.

JIM

Well, that's not what the judge said.

JOYCE

If a judge heard a recording of this conversation, you know what he'd do?

JIM

Yes. He'd throw me in jail. And in a few months, James would die. And I wouldn't be there to hold his hand and show him how to have some grace and defiance in the face of this fucking thing that's eating away at him. That's if you're taping this conversation. And if you let a judge listen to it.

JOYCE

Uh, Grace? Grace? Shaving your head is grace?

JIM

Defiance.

JOYCE

Do you really think that you can spare his feelings by facing down a bunch of schoolchildren?

JIM

I don't know. But I'm pretty sure they won't make fun of him anymore.

JOYCE

I don't understand you. I don't understand any of this. I don't understand a fucking thing you do. Why did you do this to yourself? Why did you do this to us?

JIM

Are we still talking about my hair?

JOYCE

Jim. Why are you doing this to me?

JIM

I'm not doing anything to you.

JOYCE

How can you do this to your son? He needs you. He needs his father.

JIM

He has a father.

JOYCE

Every other weekend.

JIM

Well, who chose that?

JOYCE

Uh, you left. Don't you feel guilty? Don't you feel any guilt at all? For him?

JIM

A little.

JOYCE

Just a little?

JIM

Some, yeah. Yes.

There is the sound of a car door slamming.

JOYCE

You bastard.

JIM

Don't call me...

...James comes into the playground...

JAMES

...Dad?

JOYCE

Get back in the car, James.

JAMES

I came back...

JOYCE

...go back and get warm...

JAMES

...I want to ask Dad something.

JIM

Hey, buddy? Listen to your mom. You go get back in the car where it's warm, okay?

JAMES

But I forgot to ask you, can you come on Tuesday?

JIM

Uh huh, I can...

JOYCE

...James...

JAMES

...wait mom, because...

JIM

...don't worry...

JAMES

...because it's the last one.

JIM

I know. I know, I'll be there.

JAMES

And then maybe I'll be finished.

JIM

Yeah.

JAMES

Or I might have to start going every day again.

JOYCE

Jim...

JIM

...I know, buddy. Let's hope for finished. You're getting tired though, I can tell. Go back to the car and Mom'll be there in a minute to take you home.

JAMES

Okay.

JIM

Okay.

He gets down to hug James again.

James taps his forehead.

JAMES

Don't forget.

JIM

I won't. I don't.

James goes back into the light and we hear the sound of a door slam once again.

JOYCE

Don't forget what?

JIM

What he said before.

JOYCE

What did he say?

JIM

He said, "I wrote my name on you." See, that's grace. I don't know a grown up who has an ounce of the strength and power and faith that that kid has. Grace. That grace is what will get him through this.

JOYCE

He's dying, Jim. He's not getting through anything.

JIM

You don't know that.

JOYCE

He's not going to get through it, not for much longer, no matter what you think.

JIM

And no matter what you think, he might. He might make it through. It's happened before.

JOYCE

Two remissions. Two of them. God knows how many treatments and programs. And it's back again. He's spent more of his life sick than well. I don't know that I want him to make it through. Don't you remember the second time, waiting? Watching him every day? Wanting to hope, but being afraid? Knowing that he knew? Knowing that he could feel it before we could see it, creeping back in from wherever it had been hiding? I don't want him to go through that again. I don't want to watch him go through it.

JIM

You want him to die.

JOYCE

Uh, if it's that or live in pain and torture, yeah, I want him to be at peace.

JIM

Who says that you're at peace when you die?

JOYCE

At least it'll be over.

JIM

Nothing's ever over.

JOYCE

Except for us.

He doesn't say anything.

JOYCE

Why are you doing this?

JIM

You gave up.

JOYCE

I never gave up on us.

JIM

You gave up on James. You want him to die.

Pause.

JOYCE

I want you to die...

...she storms off. There is the slam of a car door. As the engine revs up, Jim raises his hand to wave. The headlights wash over him and then fall away.

It is much darker now.

He stands for a moment in the darkness.

JIM

Are you there?

Silence.

JIM

Are you there? Are you? I, listen, I'd like to, I have a question for you. Are you there? Please? Please come back. I need to know if, listen to me, I don't know if you're listening to me, but I want to know about my son. The boy you met? He's sick. It isn't, he isn't doing well and, I know you know things, I know you can tell, I know you can see what's going to happen, can you tell me about my son? Can you? Are you there? Please, please, please come back and talk to me. Hello? Are you there?

He sits down heavily on the cold ground.

JIM

Oh god, god, I'm so sorry, I'm...

...he puts his head in his hands and cries quietly. The first few flakes of snow begin to fall.

Long silence.

He looks up.

The boy in the red sweater is there.

JIM

Hi.

RED BOY

Hello.

JIM

I thought you'd left.

RED BOY

I can't leave, not yet.

JIM

When we got here, I thought "Oh god, what if he's finished and..."

RED BOY

...no, not yet.

JIM

Do you need help? Can I help you dig?

RED BOY

The ground is frozen.

JIM

Aren't you cold.

RED BOY

No.

JIM

Can you help me?

Silence.

He lights a cigarette.

JIM

Can you tell me, what's the matter?

RED BOY

I don't like those.

JIM

Yeah, I don't much either.

RED BOY

Why do you do it?

JIM

I don't know. It'll kill you, I know, but, I don't know.

Pause.

JIM

My son is dying. Every week they make him drink poison, to kill off what's inside of him. And everyone lies to him, tells him that it'll make him better. But he just gets sicker and sicker and his hair is falling out and he can't sleep and...

...pause.

JIM

Is he going to die? Please. I don't want him to die.

The boy says nothing.

JIM

Something bad happened to you, didn't it? You died?

RED BOY

Yes.

JIM

How long? How old are you?

RED BOY

I don't know.

JIM

How old were you when...

...the boy turns away...

JIM

...wait. I'm sorry. Please.

RED BOY

I can't remember.

JIM

What can you remember? Can you remember your mother? Did you have a family? What did you do? Were you in school? I'm sorry. James is dying. I don't want him to die. Is he going to?

RED BOY

Everyone dies.

JIM

What's it like?

RED BOY

It's bad.

JIM

After. What's it like after?

RED BOY

I don't know.

JIM

Is he going to die? Is he? Will you tell me? I know you know, I know you can tell. Tell me. I don't want to, will I have to, oh god, I don't want to have to watch him die.

RED BOY

You won't.

JIM

What? What do you mean? I could get hit by a bus tomorrow and not have to watch him die. What do you mean? Is he going to die, but I won't see it? Will I be there?

RED BOY

No. You won't be there.

JIM

God, if he's going to die I want to be there. But I don't want him to die.

RED BOY

Jimmy, everyone dies.

JIM

But not now. Not James. I don't care if he dies when he's old, after I'm dead, after he had lived, that'd be okay.

RED BOY

He dies after you're dead.

JIM

What's it like? Afterwards?

RED BOY

I don't know. It's . . . lonely. Not at first. My friends would come and play, but they couldn't see me. Once my mother came. With my father. They had a baby with them. They just sat for awhile and watched everybody playing. Then my mother started crying and he took her home. They didn't come back.

Silence.

RED BOY

My friends got older. They got taller. And then they were gone. For awhile there were always children, but not any more. Sometimes people come here to drink and, but I don't let them see me. They're...

...pause.

RED BOY

You have snow on your face.

JIM

You know, you can only get so cold. After awhile you start to get warm again.

RED BOY

Are you cold?

JIM

Not cold enough to be warm. Not yet.

The boy wipes the snow off of Jim's face.

RED BOY

You should go home.

JIM

I don't want to. It's not home. It's just an empty place. I left my home.

RED BOY

Why?

JIM

I don't know. It was an awful thing to do, I know, but I just couldn't, I just couldn't stay. I could stay here. This is a nice place.

RED BOY

You'd freeze.

JIM

Is James going to die?

The boy does not answer.

JIM

Will I see him again? Afterwards? Does that happen? I'd be okay if I knew that he'd be waiting for me. I'd be okay knowing that he'd be there . . . but you said I die before him, didn't you? No, I know, you didn't say it. But that's what you told me. That would be alright with me. If I knew that he would have someone waiting for him, if I could get there first and be waiting for him...

...the boy wipes the snow off of Jim's face.

RED BOY

Your face is cold.

JIM

That would be okay. I could stand it, knowing that he'd have me there.

RED BOY

Jimmy.

JIM

Listen. Can you hear the snow?

RED BOY

Yes.

JIM

That's my favorite sound in the whole world. You hear how quiet it is? I love that sound. Why does it get quieter when it snows?

RED BOY

I don't know.

JIM

God, I'd give anything to stay here for the rest of my life and listen to the snow. It's so quiet, can you hear it?

RED BOY

I hear it.

JIM

Listen...

...the boy sits next to him, leaning his head against Jim's shoulder. Jim begins to cry.

JIM

Oh god, god . . . I don't want him to die alone...

...the boy reaches up again to wipe his face.

The lights fade slowly while Jim cries.

Black.

Epilogue: Morning

In the darkness we can hear someone crying.

The lights rise on the playground, morning.

The playground is blanketed in snow. The bench is barely visible. The slide and crawlspaces have a thick covering on top. The swings are immersed up to the chains in large drifts.

The boy in the red sweater is sitting center, near a large drift of snow, crying.

Long silence, but for the sound of his weeping.

After a long moment, the lights fade.

Black.