

# **THE RUBBER ROOM**

by Ruth McKee

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## **CHARACTERS**

DIANE

A high-school principal.

MARK

An English teacher.

STEVE

A middle-school History teacher.

PRISCILLA

A high-school student.

## **SETTING**

Los Angeles, present day.

*The principal's office.*

DIANE

Well, that doesn't make sense to me.  
 I took her temperature before I dropped her off.  
 Yes, at seven. No - Six-thirty.  
 It was normal. Well, slightly higher, maybe, but not over  
 100.  
 I wouldn't...I wouldn't have dropped her off if I'd thought  
 she was sick. I work in a school, I am fully aware of what  
 that...  
 No. No, just, check your thermometer, that's all that I'm  
 saying.

*Mark knocks.*

DIANE

Check your thermometer. Get a new thermometer! Check it again  
 and call me back.

DIANE

(to Mark)

I'm sorry about that.

MARK

Trouble with the daycare?

DIANE

They keep telling me Asia has a fever. She's sweating and she  
 won't keep her socks on. It's been every day this week. She  
 just runs...hot. I don't know why they can't just accept  
 that.

MARK

I --

DIANE

I mean, what is it with this place? When I was a kid my  
 mother would dump me with a babysitter, some unlicensed,  
 uninsured old lady, and unless I was bleeding - no, not even -  
 unless I had actually broken a bone and been taken to the  
 emergency room, they would leave her alone until the end of  
 the day. Now they're all so afraid of being sued they call me  
 every five minutes. I might as well have Asia here in my  
 office with me. I mean, what am I paying these people for?

MARK

It gets better.

DIANE

Does it?

MARK

Sure. I mean, how many times a day do you call parents of the students in this school?

DIANE

Most of them, never. A couple of them every day. Are you saying that my four-month-old is already a problem child?

MARK

It's too early to tell.

DIANE

Great.

MARK

My son is eleven now, and I hardly ever get a call.

DIANE

But you're divorced.

MARK

Right.

DIANE

I didn't mean anything by that... You're a great father.

MARK

I know.

DIANE

How is Christopher doing?

MARK

He's fine. Why don't you cut to the chase, Diane?

DIANE

I'm sorry?

MARK

It's early, you're babbling, and I just want to know what's going on.

DIANE

Right. I think you'd...better sit down.

MARK

There's something wrong with my classroom?

DIANE

Why don't you close the door?

MARK

Because when I came into the building, security said there was something wrong with my room, I had to come see you.

DIANE

Have a seat.

MARK

Did the ceiling tiles finally fall down? Because I've been telling Arturo for months. There are a couple of them just hanging on by a thread. All it would take would be one kid to throw a pencil up there, and they'd all come crashing down on the students' heads.

DIANE

Really?

MARK

And who knows what lead or asbestos will come down with the fall. It's a real liability. Or potential liability, anyway.

DIANE

I'll tell Arturo to get on that.

MARK

Great.

DIANE

But, no. The ceiling is fine. Well, not fine, but you know, holding steady.

MARK

Okay.

DIANE

I needed to talk to you before classes started. I couldn't let - it's kind of an urgent matter.

MARK

What's going on? Am I being laid off?

DIANE

No.

MARK

I know there have been cuts, but I teach English. You can't cut back on English, no matter what anyone says.

DIANE

Why would anyone say that?

MARK

You're taking the novel class.

DIANE  
No.

MARK  
Creative writing. No more electives!

DIANE  
We're not making any cuts.

MARK  
Oh. Okay.

DIANE  
It's not the room, it's not the schedule, it's not...

MARK  
It's not me, it's you.

DIANE  
No, actually. It is you.

MARK  
Oh. I was just making a -

DIANE  
I know.

MARK  
Bad joke. What did I do?

DIANE  
We've had some complaints.

MARK  
Complaints?

DIANE  
About your behavior. Probably because of your bad jokes.

MARK  
Ha ha.

DIANE  
It seems there's been a...lack of sensitivity.

MARK  
Wait. Who complained?

DIANE  
Your students.

MARK  
Because they don't like my jokes?

DIANE

Maybe complaints isn't the right word. Reports.

MARK

Of what?

DIANE

I'm supposed to tell you to get a lawyer.

MARK

For what? Aren't you at least going to tell me what people have complained - or reported to you - about?

DIANE

Mark, don't make this harder for us than it has to be.

MARK

I really don't feel like I'm the one making things hard here.

DIANE

I'm sorry. I had to.

MARK

You had to...?

DIANE

I was supposed to notify security not to let you into the building. I thought I could at least have them send you in here, have a conversation about it.

MARK

Why would I be barred from the building?

DIANE

Just temporarily. Until we investigate the...the...

MARK

Complaints.

DIANE

Reports.

MARK

Right.

DIANE

It could be really quick. We might be able to get to the bottom of this in a day! Or two.

MARK

But in the meantime, you have to listen to every half-cocked "report" from every student who's pissed off that I didn't give her an A in creative writing.

DIANE

So you do know what this is about.

MARK

No! That's what I'm telling you.

DIANE

There are some pretty serious charges, Mark.

MARK

Charges.

DIANE

Not that I'm saying I believe them. Or that I don't. I'm trying to stay impartial.

MARK

I appreciate that.

DIANE

But what the students are saying... and it's not just one student, either. There are a whole bunch of girls who've been coming by this office. And then on Monday I started getting calls from parents.

MARK

Diane. I still don't know what you're talking about.

DIANE

And I looked up their grades. Several of them are getting A's in your class already.

MARK

Please, just tell me what's going on here.

DIANE

Mark.

MARK

Please believe me! I don't know what you're getting at.

DIANE

But you knew it was your creative writing class.

MARK

That's usually the one where they learn to use their imaginations.

DIANE

Well, if the allegations are false, it seems like it may be a group hallucination.

MARK

So you're saying you believe them.

DIANE

(handing an envelope)

I'm just supposed to give you this.

MARK

What is it?

DIANE

Your reassignment.

MARK

My -

DIANE

I think you'd better get a lawyer. Most people start with the union. I can give you a number to call. That's something I can help you with.

DIANE

I was supposed to just leave that with security, but it didn't seem fair. You know, because we're friends. I figured the least I could do was tell you to your face.

MARK

(opening the envelope)

But this doesn't...this still doesn't say what I'm being accused of.

DIANE

I know.

MARK

I'm not trying to play dumb here.

DIANE

This school has been through a lot in the last few weeks. We're all still recovering. And the students... It seems like they're looking for someone to blame.

MARK

This is about Tammy Chung.

DIANE

This is about Tammy Chung.

MARK

But I'm...I'm more broken up about Tammy's death than anyone! I've been spearheading this whole recovery process.

Organizing counselling groups, getting students to write about their feelings. I've been... more than sensitive. I think I've gone above and beyond.

DIANE

I know! I know, you've been great and...maybe that's what's made them turn on you, I don't know. *(beat)*  
You're a good teacher, Mark. This will blow over.

MARK

But in the meantime, what? I just go home?

DIANE

Read the letter.

MARK

*(he reads)*

I have to report to the district office.

DIANE

I'm sorry.

MARK

They're putting me in a fucking Rubber Room.

DIANE

I hear it's not that bad.

MARK

You can do something about this, can't you?

DIANE

I can't take a side.

MARK

That's not what I'm asking.

DIANE

I can try to get to the bottom of the allegations as quickly as possible.

MARK

And in the meantime, I sit. I get paid to just sit.

DIANE

It's better than the alternative, isn't it?

MARK

What's the alternative?

DIANE

At least you've made it through your first three years.  
At least you have tenure! If you didn't have tenure...

MARK

You would just fire me?

DIANE

This way we have time to sort through the situation. It's a good deal for everyone. You keep getting your paycheck, insurance, pension, everything. In the olden days they probably would have just fired you, yes.

MARK

No. In the olden days they would take the teacher's word above the students'.

DIANE

And in the olden days teachers could do anything to their students, and no one could complain.

MARK

What are they saying, Diane?

DIANE

You need to talk to a lawyer. I shouldn't -

MARK

You think I did something wrong.

DIANE

I'm just trying to be impartial. As the principal here I'm responsible for both my teachers and for my students.

MARK

And as my friend?

DIANE

This is the best thing for everyone. You'll get a hearing, and until then, all that they ask is that you be...patient.

MARK

Right.

DIANE

You can do that, can't you?

*Lights.*

**SCENE 2**

*A sidewalk outside the district office building.*

STEVE

Smoke?

MARK

I don't...

STEVE

Oh, that's cool. I was just going to tell you that if you do, you need to go across the street. It's a public building, so you've gotta be twenty feet away.

MARK

Oh. Okay.

STEVE

Security guard is pretty strict about it. But there's a bunch of them who smoke over there, every break they get. Freddie, Myla, standing over there on the corner? You could go join their little clique if you want. Or you could try, anyway. They're pretty tight.

MARK

Okay.

STEVE

Best way to get in is to bring the cigarettes. Then they'll be your best friends for life. Or, you know, as long as you're in here.

MARK

I don't think I'll be here very long.

STEVE

Never hurts to have friends.

MARK

I really just came out to get fresh air.

STEVE

Yeah, it's crowded in there today. February is definitely the busiest month. Kids start panicking about their grades and pointing fingers at the teachers, teachers can't see the end of the year and start to lose it, suddenly everyone's finding themselves in trouble. It adds up.

MARK

But then what, they get through the cases...?

STEVE

No, then people start quitting. March, April, people get spring fever, decide that they're done being cooped up in a windowless room with buzzing fluorescents. They never get through all the cases.

MARK

How long have you been coming here?

STEVE

Three years, give or take.

MARK

Three years?

STEVE

Don't worry, man. They're not all like that. If there's a criminal case they get you out faster. Because I mean, if you're convicted, they can fire you, and that's it. You got a criminal case?

MARK

No!

STEVE

Me neither. Just disciplinary. And they've barely even got a case there, cause of free speech issues. They don't know what to do with me, cause they know that I'm right, but they know that if they do the right thing and let me go back in the classroom the PTA would lose their shit. So in the meantime...

MARK

What did you do?

STEVE

Just a little role-playing.

MARK

With your students?

STEVE

Middle school history. I try to spice things up every once in a while. We were studying the second world war and I thought I'd see how many of the little lemmings I could brainwash in an hour. I dressed up as Hitler. Had like half of them saying "Heil Hitler" in about five minutes. Black, Jewish, it didn't matter. It was pretty sick.

MARK

Sounds like it.

STEVE  
You judging me?

MARK  
No.

STEVE  
Because if you're judging me, you don't know what it's like. These kids think history is just a bunch of dry bullshit in a textbook. I was making it real for them.

MARK  
I get that.

STEVE  
What did you do?

MARK  
I'm an English teacher.

STEVE  
No, I mean what did you do to get sent here?

MARK  
I don't know.

STEVE  
Come on, man. I told you what I did. I won't judge.

MARK  
It's not about that.

STEVE  
Well the only guys who come in here claiming they're totally innocent are the rapists and pedophiles.

MARK  
Jesus!

STEVE  
That what you want me to think about you?

MARK  
No. *(beat)* One of my students killed herself.

STEVE  
Shit, that's real.

MARK  
It was. It was real. She was in my creative writing class. People are saying... people are saying that I should have known. I should have been more sensitive.

But fuck, how was I supposed to know? She was one of those Queen Bee types. She sure as hell wasn't sensitive to anyone else's feelings.

STEVE

And they all talk about killing themselves at one point or another. I know I did.

MARK

Exactly!

STEVE

Shit, I still talk about killing myself, every day. I mean, if I spend another day in this place, I really think I am going to kill myself.

MARK

But you don't really mean...

STEVE

What do you think?

MARK

You shouldn't. You really shouldn't. There are people that you can talk to -

STEVE

Come on, I'm just fucking with you!

STEVE

Still raw, huh?

MARK

I guess so.

STEVE

What's your name?

MARK

Mark.

STEVE

Mark. Steve. Don't be so uptight, Mark.

MARK

I'm sorry. I'm just a little...disoriented at the moment.

STEVE

I get that. So what's the plan?

MARK

The plan?

STEVE

The strategy. You think you can hunker down and stick it out in this place, or you got some other scheme in mind?

MARK

I was actually hoping that they'd have my hearing and I'd get back to the classroom?

STEVE

Ah, okay. You're still in the honeymoon phase.

MARK

You're telling me that's not going to happen?

STEVE

It could happen. I don't mean to be all Debbie Downer about it.

MARK

Okay.

STEVE

It's just always good to have a Plan B ready, that's all that I'm saying.

MARK

What's your Plan B?

STEVE

What do you think? *(a pause, he waits)* Acting!

MARK

Okay...

STEVE

It's what got me into this mess, so I figure maybe it'll get me out. I've been taking classes, improv, scene work, whatever. I mean, as long as I've got a steady paycheck and no homework, I figure this is the time. Get out there, do a little retraining. Think about what's the next career's going to be.

MARK

Teaching was my Plan B. I already tried the other career.

STEVE

What did you do?

MARK

I was a writer.

STEVE

Like a novelist or a screenwriter or something?

MARK

A poet. And a nonfiction writer. Book reviews, features on writers, that kind of thing.

STEVE

You write anything I might have read?

MARK

You read a lot of literary criticism?

STEVE

I read the paper.

MARK

I mostly did magazine work. Had a piece in Harper's once. Esquire, GQ, Playboy.

STEVE

No shit! I might have seen that.

MARK

Oh yeah? You read the articles?

STEVE

They're the best part.

MARK

That's what I hear.

STEVE

But that's huge. Sounds like you had it made. Why'd you give it up?

MARK

I had a kid. My wife was an actor. Working, but still. Our income was all over the place. One of us needed a steady job. And I wasn't happy. No one was printing my poems and most of the books I had to read were shit. So I was like, "instead of spending all of this energy reading bad writing, why don't I just go to the source and do something about it, you know?"

STEVE

But you teach public school in Los Angeles. None of those kids are going to grow up to be writers for real. If they're really lucky they'll grow up to be secretaries, plumbers, electricians.

MARK

You never know. I had one or two who could do it, if someone gave them a shot.

STEVE

That's cool.

MARK

And I mean, I bet none of your students are going to grow up to be historians, but it's still worth your time, isn't it, to teach them about history?

STEVE

I guess.

(shrugs)

My mom's a history teacher. I guess I never really thought about it that much. It was just something to do, you know, a steady paycheck. Until they sent me here I never really thought about what I wanted to do.

(beat)

You want to go get a drink?

MARK

It's eleven in the morning.

STEVE

Makes the day go much faster.

MARK

I thought we only had a ten-minute break.

STEVE

We'll come back after lunch. It's so crowded in there today. No one will notice.

MARK

I don't know.

STEVE

You've got something better to do?

MARK

I guess not.

STEVE

We go get a beer, get a taco, come back after lunch and take a nap. Then boom, it's three o'clock already. Irma won't even notice that we're gone.

MARK

I just don't want to risk...

STEVE

What?

MARK

I just got tenure last year. I know this place is a drag, but as long as I follow the rules I've got job security. They can't kick me out, so... I want to follow the rules.

STEVE

You know how hard it is for them to kick you out?

MARK

I just don't want to give them any excuses.

STEVE

No one will notice. Trust me. I've been doing this for years.

*Lights.*

**SCENE 3**

*Diane's office.*

DIANE

Priscilla Carrero.

PRISCILLA

Yes?

DIANE

I'm Principal Labrique. I don't believe we've had the pleasure.

PRISCILLA

I know who you are.

DIANE

Right. And I think you know what this is about?

PRISCILLA

No.

DIANE

No. You didn't talk to any of the students who were waiting in the office with you?

PRISCILLA

I don't really know those girls.

DIANE

But news tends to get around.

PRISCILLA

Okay.

DIANE

You really don't know anything.

PRISCILLA

I'm sorry?

DIANE  
Just have a seat.

PRISCILLA  
Am I in trouble?

DIANE  
No.

PRISCILLA  
Okay.

DIANE  
I've asked you to come here - I'm asking all of his students -  
to talk about Mr. Hunter.

PRISCILLA  
What happened to him?

DIANE  
You weren't there when we made the announcement?

PRISCILLA  
I don't know.

DIANE  
He was removed from your classroom.

PRISCILLA  
Well, duh.

DIANE  
We're investigating some allegations. That's why I called you  
in here today.

PRISCILLA  
Is Mr. Hunter ever going to come back?

DIANE  
That's what this investigation will determine.

PRISCILLA  
I hope he comes back. That substitute you've got in there is  
an uptight bitch.

DIANE  
Language?

PRISCILLA  
She is! She's got like a stopwatch out and she gives us ten  
minutes to write and yells "go" like we're on some kind of  
team or something.

DIANE

She came highly recommended.

PRISCILLA

It doesn't make me feel very creative.

DIANE

Did Mr. Hunter make you feel creative?

PRISCILLA

I guess.

DIANE

What did he do that was different?

PRISCILLA

I don't know.

DIANE

There must be something you can think of.

PRISCILLA

I guess he like, gave us prompts.

DIANE

Like what?

PRISCILLA

Like write about what scares us or about our secrets or whatever.

DIANE

You told Mr. Hunter your secrets?

PRISCILLA

No, we wrote about them.

DIANE

For him to read.

PRISCILLA

If we wanted to.

DIANE

And what if you didn't want him to read what you wrote?

PRISCILLA

Then we could just rip it up.

DIANE

Did Tammy Chung let Mr. Hunter read her secrets?

PRISCILLA

How should I know?

DIANE

You were in a class together.

PRISCILLA

So?

DIANE

I'm just asking: Do you remember, was Tammy Chung one of the people who let Mr. Hunter read about her secrets, or was she someone who just ripped her writing up?

PRISCILLA

He said that he was going to get us a paper shredder. When he was in school they could burn their secrets in a big fire, but we can't do that anymore because of fire codes.

DIANE

You didn't answer my question.

PRISCILLA

I don't know.

DIANE

What I'm trying to get at is: do you know if Tammy ever wrote something, or said something, that should have led Mr. Hunter to know that Tammy might...

PRISCILLA

What?

DIANE

Want to kill herself. Or that she was in pain, that she...cut herself?

PRISCILLA

She cut herself?

DIANE

Anything like that. Anything that would indicate that Mr. Hunter should have been...more on the lookout with her. More sensitive to her feelings, to the situation.

PRISCILLA

Tammy was a bitch.

DIANE

Okay. Okay, that's helpful. Please understand: I'm not trying to put any ideas in your head. I'm just trying to understand what happened in that classroom, from your point of view.

PRISCILLA

Nothing happened.

DIANE

We both know that something did.

PRISCILLA

Yeah, you fired Mr. Hunter.

DIANE

He hasn't been fired, he's just on probation.

PRISCILLA

Whatever.

DIANE

You know what that means?

PRISCILLA

You think I'm stupid?

DIANE

Okay, so Mr. Hunter was put on probation for a little while so that we all, and that includes me, can investigate what happened.

PRISCILLA

Did he get sent to jail?

DIANE

No, not like that. He's on a disciplinary leave.

PRISCILLA

So he's suspended? He's at home?

DIANE

No, he has a place he has to go every day.

PRISCILLA

He's teaching at another school?

DIANE

No, it's a place where he...he waits.

PRISCILLA

For how long?

DIANE

The school day.

PRISCILLA

So he's in detention?

DIANE

Yeah, I guess it's like that. Except he gets paid. It's a job. It's not so bad. And in the meantime, we try to figure out what happened in the classroom.

PRISCILLA

You sent him to detention before you knew if he did anything?

DIANE

No, I'm not the one who sent him.

PRISCILLA

Then who did?

DIANE

The...the system.

PRISCILLA

Who's that?

DIANE

Excuse me?

PRISCILLA

Who's the system? Who picked up the phone? Who signed the papers?

DIANE

Well, I was the one who made the call, but I was just following protocol for when students and parents make a complaint. I didn't make the policy.

PRISCILLA

That sounds like bullshit to me.

DIANE

It's not.

PRISCILLA

You're trying to turn him into a killer, just like everybody else.

DIANE

No, Priscilla, listen. Mr. Hunter is my friend.

PRISCILLA

And you sent him to teacher jail because some stupid kids are saying shit about him, shit that you don't even know is true! You don't even wait to hear the whole story!

DIANE

But that's what I'm trying to do here now. I'm trying to get the whole story!

PRISCILLA

Bullshit.

DIANE

I wasn't there that day, but you were. So if what they're saying isn't true, if there's another side to the story, then why don't you tell me about it?

PRISCILLA

I don't know anything.

DIANE

I have the attendance records. I know you were there. And I'm being as thorough as I can be. I'm talking to every person who was in the classroom that day. I want to hear from you.

PRISCILLA

Why? Why does it matter? If everyone says that Mr. Hunter did something wrong, what does it matter if one person says something different?

DIANE

It matters if it's the truth.

PRISCILLA

Yeah, sure.

DIANE

Listen to me, Priscilla. I'm really interested in what you have to say. From what I'm hearing from the other students, it sounds like... you played a pivotal role in the ...incident.

PRISCILLA

I didn't!

DIANE

Well that's what I'm hearing.

PRISCILLA

But it's not my fault!

DIANE

I'm not saying that it is.

PRISCILLA

Yes you are! Everyone is saying that. Everyone's saying that it's my fault Tammy died. Or Mr. Hunter's fault. Everyone's looking for someone to blame and it's either him or me.

DIANE

I know it's not your fault. What happened to Tammy was a tragedy, and of course we all feel guilty, but she did this to herself. We can't blame anyone for what happened to her.

PRISCILLA

Then where is Mr. Hunter?

DIANE

He's...he understands what's happening here.

PRISCILLA

When is he coming back?

DIANE

After his hearing.

PRISCILLA

There's going to be like a trial?

DIANE

Yes, a trial. Where we present the evidence of this investigation. Where people stand up and say what really happened that day. What they heard and saw...

PRISCILLA

No. No way.

DIANE

And if they find him guilty, he'll probably be fired. But if they don't...

PRISCILLA

So you want me to do what? Speak in front of the whole school? Get up in front of everyone and tell them Mr. Hunter is innocent?

DIANE

I just want you to tell the truth.

PRISCILLA

I can't do that.

DIANE

Priscilla, please.

PRISCILLA

I'm sorry, Lady. I don't know anything.

DIANE

If the other girls are lying, then you need to tell the truth. You could save a man's job here. You have that power. Don't you want to help him?

PRISCILLA

No, that's not true. You have the power, and you sent him away. You put him in detention. This is your problem, lady, not mine.

DIANE

But they're my students. They're saying that he -- he pushed her. And I have to listen to them. But you were there. You heard what he said, too. So if you have another story, then please. Tell me.

PRISCILLA

Okay, here's my story: Mr. Hunter was a great teacher. You took him away and gave us a shitty one.

(silence)

Can I go?

*Lights.*

**SCENE 4**

*Two weeks later. The Mexican place by the district office.*

STEVE

Another Corona for my friend.

MARK

I thought you were just going to the bathroom.

STEVE

One for the road.

MARK

It's twelve fifty-three.

STEVE

Chug!

MARK

I'm serious, Steve. It's been twice this week. Irma is starting to look at us funny.

STEVE

Irma looks at everyone funny.

MARK

We can't be late again. She's going to report us.

STEVE

So? You Ivy-league boys never learned how to chug?

*Mark grabs the beer and chugs.*

Wow. STEVE

Now let's go. MARK

No man, you gotta do this one, too. STEVE

That one's all you. MARK

Okay then. STEVE

*Steve warms up as if he's going to chug the beer, then at the last minute, takes a little sip.*

Come on. MARK

Psych! STEVE

Let's go. MARK

Not until one of us finishes this beer. STEVE

I can't do another one. I'll piss my pants waiting for a bathroom break. MARK

Just say that you're sick. STEVE

I think that might make Irma a little suspicious. MARK

Fuck Irma! STEVE

You fuck Irma. MARK

No you fuck Irma! STEVE

Come on, man. Just chug the beer and let's go. MARK

Okay, okay. STEVE

*Steve makes as if he's going to chug,  
then takes another small sip.*

You fucker. MARK

I'm not done yet. STEVE

Give it to me. MARK

No. STEVE

Give me the beer now. MARK

Chug it, chug it, chug it! STEVE

*Mark pours it out on the floor.*

There. Now it's finished. MARK

You didn't just do that. STEVE

Let's go. MARK

You didn't just dump out my beer. My beer that I paid for  
with my hard-earned money. STEVE

Hard-earned? MARK

You don't think what we do is hard? STEVE

Not when you're drunk all day long. MARK

I'm drunk all day long because it's the only way to make the  
time pass! I'm drunk because I'm losing my mind, you fucker.  
I'm losing my fucking mind! STEVE

MARK

Okay, it's okay.

STEVE

That new guy, Arnold? If he takes off his shoes one more time and shows off his stinky little toes, sticking through his socks.

MARK

Arnold is all right.

STEVE

Arnold got a fourteen-year-old pregnant.

MARK

Allegedly.

STEVE

The guy's a creep. They're all creeps. I can't stand the smell of them. Something is definitely rotting in there, and I'm starting to think that it's me. If I don't get another drink before I go back, I really think I'm going to fucking do it.

MARK

Don't say that.

STEVE

I am. I'm gonna fucking do it.

MARK

Please don't talk that way. You know that I -

STEVE

I can't take it any longer! This afternoon. At the end of the day, when everyone's punching out for the weekend? I'm gonna reach into my bag, and I'm going to pull out -

MARK

Steve.

STEVE

My phone! And I'm going to call my fucking principal and tell him that I quit!

MARK

Right.

STEVE

I quit! I'm totally serious.

MARK

Don't fuck around with me like that.

STEVE

Mr. Sensitive over here. Still too soon?

MARK

It's always going to be too soon.

STEVE

Mr. Sensitive, still feeling guilty about little Tammy Chung. Little Tammy the cutter.

MARK

I can't believe I told you about that.

STEVE

It's not your fault when a cutter slits her wrists, man. That's what cutters do.

MARK

Not when you pick up on the signals. Not when you try to stop them.

STEVE

If you're feeling so guilty for your crimes, why don't you just quit? Why are you wasting everyone's time with that fancy lawyer.

MARK

I don't have a fancy lawyer.

STEVE

That's not what you told the shitty lawyer from the union who came to see you.

MARK

I'm just supposed to have a consultation with...with an old friend. A college friend.

STEVE

What, like you were in a frat together and now he has to look out for you?

MARK

Something like that.

STEVE

So he's doing it pro-bono?

MARK

He's just going to review my case.

STEVE

If I had money for a fancy lawyer like that, you know what I would do?

MARK

What?

STEVE

Keep that shit in the bank and get the hell out of teaching.

MARK

And do what?

STEVE

Something that doesn't suck the life out of you?

MARK

But seriously. If I quit - if I don't beat this case, I am washed up as a teacher. That's it. End of that career. What am I supposed to do with my life after that? Sell real estate?

STEVE

My sister's an agent. It's a good gig.

MARK

In another city maybe, in an another economy. But seriously, Steve. What the fuck else am I supposed to do?

STEVE

Okay fine. If you care so much about getting back into the classroom, why don't you just come clean? You haven't done anything too serious. Write up a confession, be sincere and apologize for not being more sensitive. What's the worst they're going to do to you? Give you a slap on the wrist and send you back into the classroom. I don't see what's stopping you.

MARK

You wouldn't.

STEVE

What does that mean? You did something more? You did something you didn't tell me about?

MARK

No.

STEVE

Because I told you everything I did. I bore my soul to you.

MARK

Your soul?

STEVE

You're just jealous of me.

MARK

Fuck you.

STEVE

No, you are. You're jealous because I'm young and childless, I still have hopes and aspirations, when you're at the end of the line. You're totally screwed.

MARK

I will be if we don't get back there in two minutes.

STEVE

Nobody's stopping you.

MARK

You are. Let's go.

STEVE

I need my beer.

MARK

You're an alcoholic.

STEVE

All the more reason to get me a beer.

MARK

Come on.

STEVE

You owe me.

*Mark steps away. Steve watches. Mark returns with a shot.*

STEVE

What's this?

MARK

Something you can't sip.

STEVE

Very smooth, Mr. Hunter.

MARK

Come on, drink up. We have a minute to go. Sixty seconds.

STEVE

Why don't you just go on without me.

MARK

Because I'm your friend, and friends don't let their drunk friends stay in bars and do stupid shit. It's a rule.

It is? STEVE

Yes. MARK

Wow. STEVE

Now drink up. MARK

I wish I had more friends like you when I was in my twenties. STEVE  
Maybe I wouldn't have ended up in this place.

That's not what got you here. MARK

No, it is. I was drunk. STEVE

What? MARK

When I got in trouble? I was totally shit-faced. Shit-faced STEVE  
Hitler. That's hilarious, right?

No. No, it's not. MARK

I was restaging the Beer Hall Putsch! STEVE

I don't...I don't get it. MARK

It wasn't even really a plan. I just. I woke up that morning STEVE  
and my jackass roommate had drawn a Hitler moustache on me.  
In sharpie. So I was like, "What am I supposed to do with  
this?" So I improvised a little.

I thought you said you did it to teach them a lesson. A MARK  
social experiment.

Sure. But I never would have thought of it if I had been STEVE  
sober.

MARK

I can't believe this.

STEVE

It's cracked, right?

MARK

Yes. Yes, Steve it's fucking cracked. I can't believe I'm doing this. I can't believe I'm sitting here with you, trying to help you, when you're just a fucking drunk who can't stay sober to teach!

STEVE

Who can?

MARK

Me! Me. I can stay sober to teach. I fucking care about my students, okay? That's what got me into this mess. Caring too much. Trying to defend the weak ones from the awful ones who put down every word that they say until they're too petrified to even open their mouths. And then it turns out that the awful ones are fucking suicidal cutters with their own fucked up pasts, presents, whatever. And it tears me apart because there's only so much of me and so many of them and if you try to care about them all, if you try to help them all, you only get, well, you get here! Sitting in a bar with an nihilistic anti-Semitic alcoholic when all you actually want to be doing is your job.

STEVE

I am not an anti-Semite.

(silence)

We're late.

MARK

I know.

STEVE

What are you going to do?

MARK

Apologize.

STEVE

To Irma?

MARK

To everyone.

STEVE

An apology is an admission of guilt.

MARK

Well, maybe that's the best thing for everyone. Maybe you're right. Maybe I should just fess up and see what happens.

STEVE

I meant if you were innocent.

MARK

None of us are innocent. It's impossible. We just...

STEVE

We try.

MARK

I try. *(beat)* How about you. You going to keep trying?

*Steve takes the shot and downs it.*

*Lights.*

## SCENE 5

*Diane's living room.*

DIANE

Orangina okay?

MARK

Sure.

DIANE

I've also got some of that Pelegrino Limonata stuff. And just water.

MARK

Orangina's good. Unless you have anything harder.

DIANE

No. I mean, I do, but I don't really think it's appropriate.

MARK

It was a joke.

DIANE

Was it?

MARK

Of course! What's that supposed to mean?

DIANE

I don't know. I've just heard some things.

MARK

About me?

DIANE

At the Rubber Room, yeah.

MARK

You heard that I've been drinking.

DIANE

It's just a rumor, people talking.

MARK

Well I don't know who you've been talking to.

DIANE

I've been trying to talk to everyone. To get to the bottom, you know, of your case.

MARK

Thank you for doing that.

DIANE

It's my job.

MARK

Well, thank you for talking to me.

DIANE

I hope it isn't too weird coming to my house.

MARK

No, it's great.

DIANE

I just - outside of school hours I don't really have childcare.

MARK

How is Asia doing?

DIANE

She's fine.

MARK

Phillip's not around tonight?

DIANE

He's working. He's been working a lot. We both have.

MARK

It's not easy...

DIANE

No, it isn't. But we're managing.

MARK

Good.

DIANE

So far I haven't had to take up drinking.

MARK

Neither have I.

DIANE

Mark -

MARK

I mean, you say it like it's some kind of aristocratic hobby, and not just something that people do, sometimes. Grab a drink on their lunch break? You know, like a businessman?

DIANE

You're not a businessman.

MARK

I know, but it's not like I'm operating heavy machinery or anything. Or even dealing with students.

DIANE

It's still a job.

MARK

No it's not. It's the opposite of a job. It's like a black hole where a job used to be.

DIANE

I'm working really hard to expedite your process. Please believe me, Mark.

MARK

I do believe you! But then I talk to the people in there. They're all waiting for their hearings, but a hearing is like this mythological event that never actually comes. And I honestly don't know how long I can hack it. I'm not cut out for it, Diane.

DIANE

I know.

MARK

That's why I called you yesterday. I was just starting to wonder, if maybe there's something else I can do.

DIANE

Like what?

MARK

Like apologize for something. For insensitivity or something.  
Plead down.

DIANE

To what?

MARK

I don't know. Maybe you can tell me?

DIANE

Tell you what to admit to.

MARK

Yes.

DIANE

I'd like you to tell the truth.

MARK

The truth?

DIANE

Maybe you should just tell me your side of the story.

MARK

I don't know if my lawyer...

DIANE

Did you come here for my advice?

MARK

Yes.

DIANE

Then just tell me. Off the record, or whatever.

MARK

Okay.

DIANE

Tell me about Tammy Chung.

MARK

Where do you want me to start?

DIANE

She was a student in your Creative Writing class.

MARK

Yes. And in my 11th grade English class last year as well. Not a terribly good writer. Not a terribly bad one.

DIANE

They want to publish a book of her poetry.

MARK

Who does?

DIANE

The students.

MARK

Oh god.

DIANE

It was her sister's idea. They're going to use the proceeds to start a scholarship fund.

MARK

Oh, well, that's noble. I can't imagine they'll make much from it, though.

DIANE

You don't like her poetry? I thought it was pretty good.

MARK

Maybe in context. When you know the writer is going to stick her head in the oven at the end of the book, you carry that meaning into everything, you know?

DIANE

I'm not an English teacher.

MARK

If you don't know what happens to her, it just reads like typical teen angst stuff. Her parents were mean to her, men wanted to hurt her, life would be better if she were a vampire...

DIANE

That's typical for your class?

MARK

I read so much of it my first year that I started to make rules about things they weren't allowed to write. No vampires was the first. Then abortions, multiple personalities, amnesia, serial killers.

DIANE

But don't you want encourage their individual expression?

MARK

Yes! And that's the goal. I'm trying to get them to write their own stories, not just copy the crappy dramas they've seen on TV.

DIANE

But it turns out that Tammy Chung's own story was pretty...dramatic. And when you read her poems, there are signs.

MARK

You could read any of their poems that way, trust me. There's no way to tell the ones who are really in pain from the ones who are just trying to be shocking. So this is what I do: I tell them at the beginning of the year that they are joining a *creative* writing class. I tell them all up front that everything they write - no matter how personal - I will treat it as fiction.

DIANE

But they don't always write fiction.

MARK

And so much fiction draws from real life. But I can't be the counsellor. All I can do is respond to their writing as writing. Not as confession, not as a cry for help. Because where would that put us?

DIANE

You tell me.

MARK

It would put the students on the defense! It would stifle their imagination for the darkness in life. It would leave them writing...essays. Journalistic articles.

DIANE

And allow us to catch people before they commit heinous crimes like at Virginia Tech?

MARK

And stop Tammy Chung from killing herself?

DIANE

Maybe.

MARK

Yes, maybe. But at what cost?

DIANE

What do you mean by that?

MARK

What do you mean?

DIANE

Are you saying that Tammy's life was worth less than a bunch of average short stories?

MARK

No! But I just don't think that reading into Tammy's work wasn't my responsibility. Or even my right! Teaching her to better express herself through her writing, that's my job. Isn't it?

DIANE

I don't know how that will go over with the hearing board.

MARK

But you get where I'm coming from?

DIANE

I do. I still think all her writing about pain should have triggered a red flag. Maybe you should have taken notice, sent her to a counselor.

MARK

Yeah, well. I guess maybe I was too busy stopping her from crushing all of the other students.

DIANE

Crushing them?

MARK

Tammy was not the kind of girl who cried out for teachers to help her. She was vicious, aggressive, mean.

DIANE

Because she was in pain.

MARK

I'm sure you met Tammy at some point, too. Did you send her to a counsellor, or did you just suspend her?

DIANE

I didn't have the budget for a counselor.

MARK

See?

DIANE

Yeah.

MARK

So that day. You have to understand the context, the classroom environment.

DIANE

Okay.

MARK

Tammy had been a handful since the beginning of the year, and I guess that's the day that things just came to a head. And I guess in hindsight, I am responsible for that. Because I'm the one who came up with open mic day.

DIANE

Open mic day?

MARK

You remember, at the end of last year, I was bitching about how I always had a handful of holdouts, who didn't want to do the assignments I've give them?

DIANE

Yeah.

MARK

So I decided to make Fridays into open mic day. Each week, once we finished with the rest of the work, I turned the floor over to them. Any student who had something they wanted to share, I gave them a forum to go up to the front of the class and just spill it.

DIANE

Did it work?

MARK

Yeah, pretty much. Until that Friday. That Friday we get to the open mic and no one wants to go. I don't know what it is. *(beat)* And I, well, I don't really have anything else planned. I mean, maybe I could have given them the rest of the period to read or freewrite, and in hindsight, of course, I really wish I had, but instead I figured this was a good opportunity to get a couple of the quiet ones up there. So I say: Melvin, Priscilla, why don't you read something this week. And no, no, no. They shake their heads no. So I say, "It's cool if you're shy. You don't even need to read it yourself. Hell, I'll even read it for you." And still they shake their heads no. So I say, "Melvin. You've got that one poem about the tree outside your grandma's window. Will you let me read that one?" And Melvin flashes me this shy smile. So I take out the poem that's been sitting in a pile that he turned in - he's a prolific kid, this Melvin - and I read. And it's...well, it's got some problems, but it's better than most and when read by a trained reader it's pretty stunning.

I get done and the class breaks into applause. The atmosphere is like, electric. And now everybody wants me to read their work. So I think, "This is Priscilla's time to shine." Because Priscilla is this girl, this girl who's actually a pretty talented writer, but no one has ever let on to her that she actually might be any good at anything. So I say, Priscilla, do you want to read something now? And she sort of shakes her head shyly. And then I say, "Can I read something of yours, like I did for Melvin?" And she says, all nonchalant. "I guess. If you really want to." And I tell her that I do. She's flushed with pride, but still playing it cool, and she opens her desk and she pulls out a poem.

DIANE

And?

MARK

And it's about a stabbing. I hadn't read it yet. But it's about a stabbing from the knife's perspective. But at first you don't know it's the knife because he's man. And he's in this...position. He's a tool. He knows he's hurting and yet he knows he...has to. And it's...intense. And it's...it's incredible. Because what feat of imagination it takes for a seventeen-year-old girl to be able to create something like that, you know?

DIANE

Yeah. I mean, she might have been assaulted.

MARK

But it's not really an assault. It's like the girl and the knife are in this...dance. It's like she wants it, like she...

DIANE

Like she's cutting?

MARK

Yeah. Yeah, I guess it's like that.

DIANE

Mark!

MARK

I know.

DIANE

(after a beat)

And that's it?

MARK

No, no I wish that was it. (beat) Then the class. I finish reading this poem and the class...

I look up at them and they are like, horrified. They didn't get it. They didn't get all the nuances and now they're looking at me like I'm this...

DIANE

And Tammy Chung went home that night...

MARK

And Tammy Chung looks over at Priscilla and says, "You are one nasty little girl." And the rest of the class bursts into laughter. And Priscilla - who up until now has been sitting up so tall - just shrivels. This poor girl, who was just trying to capture a real emotion. Something dark and twisted and true...and Tammy completely missed the point.

DIANE

Did she?

MARK

In that moment. You have to understand what I saw in that moment. This girl, Priscilla. Put down all her life. This girl who has never been recognized for the beautiful and amazing person she is, is back down, slumped in her chair again. That prideful girl...is gone. And that's... that's when I lost it.

DIANE

What...did you say when you lost it?

MARK

I don't know.

DIANE

What do you mean you don't know?

MARK

I honestly...don't know.

DIANE

Did you tell her to slit her wrists?

MARK

I don't know.

DIANE

Come on. You must have a guess. You must have an idea what you said.

MARK

I have all kinds of ideas! All kinds of things I said or might have said. There are the things they say I said, the girls who've been complaining. Then there are things I wish I had said, and then the things that I actually said.

And at this point I've run them all through my brain so many times that... it's a muddle. It's a completely muddy mess. I have no idea what I may or may not have said to Tammy Chung.

DIANE

That's not a very good defense, Mark.

MARK

That's what my first lawyer said.

DIANE

I don't know what I'm supposed to do with that.

MARK

The lawyer said I should just deny everything.

DIANE

Well, that's one way to handle it.

MARK

You think I should lie?

DIANE

No! But I don't think you can get away with, "I don't know what I said." You have to remember something.

MARK

But what if I really don't?

DIANE

Then I don't know what to say.

MARK

The lawyer said I should just make something up. Decide what I think the truth is - the truth that is best for me - and stick to that story.

DIANE

That's what a lawyer would say.

MARK

But the truth is never like that. The truth isn't so easy to pin down. It's nuanced, and it's gray, and it's -

DIANE

Forgotten?

MARK

Maybe.

DIANE

I guess what I need to know for myself is: Did you know what you were doing to Tammy?

MARK

In that moment?

DIANE

In any moment.

MARK

No! No, of course not.

DIANE

Okay. Okay, that's good.

MARK

My intention was to stand up for Priscilla. And maybe I said too much, maybe I went to far --

DIANE

Maybe?

MARK

But I didn't actually want Tammy Chung to die. God no.

DIANE

Okay.

MARK

I told her whatever I told her because I wanted her to know what it felt like. This girl had been bullying other kids in my class since the first day of the school year. This kid was the... vacuum of negativity that shut everyone else up, that made everyone scared of reading, of expressing themselves. And I thought that if I could just find a way to take out that bad apple--

DIANE

So you wanted to take Tammy out.

MARK

I wanted Tammy to have to look at what she was doing. I wanted her to feel what Priscilla felt. To know what it was like to be picked on like that. To have some...empathy.

DIANE

And where was your empathy, Mark?

MARK

My empathy?

DIANE

For what Tammy was going through.

MARK

I didn't know! I swear to you, I didn't know. None of us did. In that moment, I was just trying to protect my student. I needed her to know that I had her back. And maybe I went to far -

DIANE

Maybe?

MARK

I guess...I guess it stuck a chord in me somewhere.

DIANE

I guess so.

MARK

I guess...I think it might have hit me on a deeper level.

DIANE

Like, "what if it had been me, in this situation?"

MARK

Yeah, or worse. What if it had been my kid?

DIANE

Is Christopher being bullied at school?

MARK

No, that's not what this is about. Christopher's... Christopher's fine.

DIANE

I'm sorry, I didn't mean to--

MARK

It's okay. You'll see what I mean when Asia starts school.

(silence)

How did this turn into therapy?

DIANE

We probably should have had that drink.

MARK

I'm sorry to unload on you like this. I'm just-- The lawyer didn't give me a lot of time. He just wanted to know the facts, no emotion, and move on. But it's...when a child dies...

DIANE

It's an emotional situation.

MARK

It is. *(beat)* Clearly I'm still muddling through what happened.

DIANE

We all are.

MARK

So what do you think I should do?

DIANE

I don't know if there's a way to...plead down. But I can ask. I have a meeting next week. At the district. With the superintendent.

MARK

About this?

DIANE

About the whole...Tammy Chung situation. I'm supposed to present her my findings. All sides of the story.

MARK

When were you going to talk to me?

DIANE

What do you mean? I'm talking to you now, aren't I?

MARK

But this is off the record.

DIANE

Would you tell me a different story on the record?

MARK

No, no of course not.

DIANE

So I'm going to present her with my findings, and then we see if we can schedule a hearing. She wants to get this over with as quickly as we do. The whole Tammy Chung situation is a big PR nightmare for her. She wants closure as much as everyone else.

MARK

Okay, okay, that's good. You have that meeting, and we'll get this thing sorted out in, what do you think, a couple of weeks?

DIANE

I can't make any promises.

MARK

Two weeks. I think I can take that place for two more weeks.

DIANE

I hope you can, Mark. I really do.

*Lights.*

**SCENE 6**

*Outside the district office. Mark sits on a bench, eating his lunch.*

STEVE

No tacos today?

MARK

Just trying to save a little money.

STEVE

Come on, I'll buy you a beer. My treat.

MARK

Not today.

STEVE

One beer! I'm celebrating.

MARK

What happened? You get your hearing date?

STEVE

No, I'm never going to get a hearing. I got an acting job.

MARK

Seriously?

STEVE

Seriously? Come on, did you not have any faith in me at all?

MARK

What kind of job?

STEVE

Commercial. I'm going to be a Tequila man.

MARK

When does it shoot?

STEVE

Not that kind of commercial. It's more like - I get to travel around in a party bus kind of thing, promoting the product?

My acting teacher hooked me up with this new company. I go around to different places, give out free booze, get people to have a good time.

MARK

So you're going to be a party promoter?

STEVE

They're giving me a costume.

MARK

But you mostly have to just be yourself.

STEVE

That's the beauty part.

MARK

Well. That sounds...

STEVE

Fun, right?

MARK

I guess.

STEVE

Come on, dude. I thought you'd be happy for me.

MARK

What about your job?

STEVE

Fuck that job! This is better. I mean, I was just thinking about it. The other day, when you were so mad at me about making you late?

MARK

I'm sorry about that.

STEVE

No, I'm sorry. That wasn't cool of me. Because you really care about your job, and now you've got a strike with Irma, and it's all my fault.

MARK

We both said some things...

STEVE

I know! And it got me thinking. When you called me a drunk, I was like, "He's right! Maybe I didn't take the right lesson from getting sent to this place. Maybe acting isn't the thing that I'm best at. Maybe it's drinking!" So I asked my acting teacher about it, and he found me this gig!

MARK

So you're just going to quit?

STEVE

Totally. I'm out! I'm done with this place. You should come with me!

MARK

And help you promote tequila.

STEVE

I bet I could hook you up.

MARK

I've got a kid, Steve. I have a life.

STEVE

Not for long. Rubber Room is already wearing you down, man. I can see it.

MARK

That's not true.

STEVE

What did that fancy lawyer tell you? Did he promise you the moon? Did he tell you he can get you out of this place if you only keep your head up, your story straight.

MARK

I told you, he was just consulting.

STEVE

So he's not even taking your case?

MARK

No. But my principal thinks maybe she can get a hearing set.

STEVE

Does she?

MARK

Yes.

STEVE

What's she going to do to make that happen? Bribe someone?

MARK

She's meeting with the Superintendent about it.

STEVE

Like that's going to do anything.

MARK

Excuse me?

STEVE

I'm just saying. Don't get your hopes up! Don't put all of your eggs --

MARK

It's too late for that, don't you see that! I am all in. I have fucking tenure! This was supposed to be it. The job. The career. From now until retirement. Me and my students and literature and creative writing and my son on the weekends and I...I had it all figured out.

STEVE

Hey, I'm sorry man. I didn't do this to you.

MARK

Fucking Tammy Chung.

STEVE

You're blaming the dead girl now?

MARK

Yes. Yes I am. Fucking suicidal Tammy.

STEVE

You've gotta get out of here, man.

MARK

I know. I know.

*Diane enters.*

MARK

Hey! Diane.

DIANE

Are you...

MARK

A little worked up, that's all. I'm sorry. This is my buddy Steve.

STEVE

Hey.

MARK

Steve, Diane. My principal.

STEVE

Hey, that's so cool of you to visit him! Wow, the principal. Did you bring us anything?

MARK

Steve, she probably --

DIANE

I was just here for a meeting.

MARK

Exactly.

DIANE

And I also wanted to apologize for the other night.

STEVE

What's to apologize for? Did you two...

MARK

Please shut up, Steve.

STEVE

What? I just sensed there was something.

DIANE

I let my guard down a little bit. It was...unprofessional of me.

MARK

Oh, it's fine. We're friends, aren't we? You don't have to be professional all the time.

STEVE

Wait, what happened?

MARK

Steve, why don't you just --

STEVE

What? Go eat tacos all by myself?

MARK

Enjoy your lunch break.

STEVE

I am enjoying it!

MARK

I'll talk to you when we're back in the room.

STEVE

Maybe I'm not coming back to the room.

MARK

You're seriously quitting today?

STEVE

Maybe.

MARK

Do you have a contract yet? With these tequila people?

STEVE

Are you saying you don't think it's for real?

MARK

I'm saying we'll catch up back in the room, okay? Please?

STEVE

You can't make me leave.

MARK

God, you are a child! Let's...Diane?

*Mark ushers Diane over to another bench. Steve stays put.*

MARK

I'm sorry about Steve, he's...

DIANE

It's fine.

MARK

He's the sanest one here, if you can believe it.

DIANE

That's how I feel at school these days. Gloria is the only person who can even make me crack a smile.

MARK

I'm sorry I'm not there.

DIANE

It's fine. I've got too much work to spend time gossiping with you anyway.

MARK

What can I do to help?

DIANE

I just talked to the Superintendent.

MARK

Already?

DIANE

She says she wants to set the hearing for next week.

MARK

That's amazing!

DIANE

Is it? I thought maybe it seemed a little soon. For you.

MARK

Are you kidding?

DIANE

Are you sure you're ready?

MARK

Aren't you ready? I mean, I know you've got Eleanor Walsh in there subbing.

DIANE

I know, she's awful. The students are all complaining, but --

MARK

First they complain about me, now they complain about her...

DIANE

No one ever complained about you before this, Mark.

MARK

I know. And now...

DIANE

A lot of them still have good things to say.

MARK

Have you talked to Priscilla Carrero?

DIANE

I've talked to all of them.

MARK

Do you think I should talk to her?

DIANE

No!

MARK

About testifying.

DIANE

Please let me handle the students.

MARK

But Priscilla is pretty much the key to my whole thing. She's the one who can show the other side.

DIANE

But she -

MARK

She could be a really helpful witness. If there's a hearing.

DIANE

I really... that's actually what I wanted to talk to you about.

MARK

Priscilla?

DIANE

The hearing. The Superintendent is going to call your lawyer to set it up, but I think you might want to ask for more time.

MARK

What? Why?

DIANE

You can say that it's because you've just gotten new counsel, you need more time to prepare. But I'm starting to think it might be better if we just hold off a little while. Let your hearing come up on its own. Give everyone a little time?

MARK

Time for what? I'm losing my mind here, Diane. Half the people are hardened criminals, and the other half are incompetent goons. I don't belong here, and you just said it's not fair to the kids.

DIANE

It's not, but - After our conversation last week, I couldn't stop thinking. And I know I shouldn't say this, I know I shouldn't get myself involved...

MARK

What are you talking about?

DIANE

I can't believe I'm saying this.

MARK

Saying what?

DIANE

I care about you, Mark, okay? You're a good teacher, and a part of me would love to have you back in the classroom, right away. But if we have this hearing next week..

MARK

What?

DIANE

I think maybe you'd be better off sticking it out here a little longer. Until their memories fade. Until some of them graduate and, you know, we lose track?

MARK

I can win them over.

DIANE

Not with what you told me the other night.

MARK

But that was off the record!

DIANE

Wasn't it the truth?

MARK

None of us knows the truth. The class wasn't recorded. We can't rewind and see what really happened.

DIANE

But everyone else who was there remembers what you said! And they may not all be saying exactly the same thing, but it's pretty close. So if you can't even defend yourself...

MARK

You don't think I have a shot.

DIANE

I don't.

MARK

You think I'm going to lose my job, and be out on the street. One more career down the toilet. One more failure for Mark Hunter's scrapbook.

DIANE

No! I'm saying that it doesn't have to be this way!

MARK

Don't you get it? I don't have any other options.

DIANE

Yes you do.

MARK

I can make up a story -

DIANE

Or you can tell the truth -

MARK

Which will probably get me fired -

DIANE

Or you can stay here and...

MARK

Wait it out.

DIANE

Think of it as penance.

MARK

But I haven't done anything wrong!

DIANE

That's the story you're sticking to now?

MARK

I'm not like these people here. I'm a good teacher. I care about my students, and I think I had pretty great communication with them. I'm not... These teachers, they say that they want to get back to the classroom, but that's only so that people will stop watching them. They're really just in it for the paycheck. And the longer I stay here, the more the job just starts to feel like a job.

DIANE

It is a job.

MARK

But I'm not jaded the way are yet. I really feel like I was getting somewhere in that classroom. I feel like I was making a difference. But if I stay here much longer...I don't know what's going to happen to me. I can feel it creeping in.

(Beat)

You've got to help me.

DIANE

I am.

*Silence.*

MARK

What did Priscilla say? When you talked to her.

DIANE

She doesn't want to testify.

MARK

But what did she say?

DIANE

That what happened with Tammy wasn't your fault.

MARK

But you don't believe her.

DIANE

I really...I don't know what to believe anymore.

*Silence.*

*They sit quietly for a while. Steve gets up from his seat and exits. Lights.*

**SCENE 7**

*A bus stop near the high school.*

STEVE

Hey.

PRISCILLA

Hey.

STEVE

You Priscilla?

PRISCILLA

Who wants to know?

STEVE

Mister Cebowski.

PRISCILLA

"Mister," what, you a teacher?

STEVE

History.

PRISCILLA

You don't look like a teacher.

STEVE

Well, maybe that's because I just quit.

PRISCILLA

Nah, it's because you don't look old enough.

STEVE

I think that may be the nicest thing that a student has ever said to me.

PRISCILLA

Seriously?

STEVE

I taught middle school. The kids were pretty shitty.

PRISCILLA

Oh, okay.

STEVE

I wanted to talk to you.

PRISCILLA

I don't think I should.

STEVE

I told you I'm a teacher.

PRISCILLA

But not anymore and not from my school.

STEVE

Right.

PRISCILLA

So that just makes you a regular creep.

STEVE

What's it going to hurt you to talk?

PRISCILLA

I don't know yet.

STEVE

You're waiting for this bus, right? I'll just talk with you for five minutes while you wait for the bus. That's not going to hurt anybody.

PRISCILLA

I normally do my homework now.

STEVE

If you have history homework I can help you with it.

PRISCILLA

I have math.

STEVE

Then forget it. Math sucks.

PRISCILLA

It's my best subject.

STEVE

I thought that was Creative Writing.

PRISCILLA

What the hell do you know about that?

STEVE

Nothing.

PRISCILLA

Who the fuck are you?

STEVE

I told you, I'm a teacher.

PRISCILLA

Some creepy teacher who knows too much about me. How did you know my name?

STEVE

I asked.

PRISCILLA

No you didn't.

STEVE

I mean I asked around. I asked about you. I wanted to talk to you.

PRISCILLA

Are you a friend of my dad's?

STEVE

I don't know, who's your dad?

PRISCILLA

I don't think you know him.

STEVE

I'm a friend of Mr. Hunter's.

PRISCILLA

Oh.

STEVE

Yeah. So can we talk?

PRISCILLA

No.

STEVE

But Mr. Hunter, if he showed up at your bus stop, would you talk to him?

PRISCILLA

I guess.

STEVE

He wants to talk to you.

PRISCILLA

He does?

STEVE

He heard that you don't want to testify.

PRISCILLA

Who said that?

STEVE

He wants to see you.

PRISCILLA

What for?

STEVE

Just to talk.

PRISCILLA

About what happened?

STEVE

About whatever you want.

PRISCILLA

Oh.

STEVE

I can take you to where they have him, if you want.

PRISCILLA

Where they *have* him?

STEVE

When they take a teacher out of the classroom, where do you think they go?

PRISCILLA

The principal said detention.

STEVE

So they put them in detention in this special place. That's where I met him. They call it a "Rubber Room."

PRISCILLA

Why?

STEVE

Because it's like a room in a mental hospital, with rubber on the walls? Where the crazies can all bounce around together and not get hurt?

PRISCILLA

There's rubber on the walls there?

STEVE

No, not literally. They just call it that because the teachers, when they're sent there, they lose their minds.

PRISCILLA

Mr. Hunter has lost his mind?

STEVE

Why don't you come visit him and see?

PRISCILLA

I should probably go home. My sister's waiting for me.

STEVE

You tell her you had to meet with a teacher, she'll understand.

PRISCILLA

Maybe I could go visit Mr. Hunter another day?

STEVE

Nah, I'll be gone.

PRISCILLA

What do you mean?

STEVE

After you stay in the Rubber Room for a certain amount of time you just...disappear. People start forgetting about you, and slowly, very slowly, you start to disappear. Your case is just forgotten. I'm almost done. People have forgotten about me, so that's it.

PRISCILLA

It, how?

STEVE

I won't be able to take you there anymore. I'll be gone.

PRISCILLA

Is that going to happen to Mister Hunter?

STEVE

Eventually.

PRISCILLA

Maybe you could give him a note for me.

STEVE

Or maybe you could see him at his hearing.

PRISCILLA

No, I can't do that.

STEVE

Why not? It would be really helpful. If you could tell your side of the story, he may get out of there before he disappears.

PRISCILLA

But I already told that principal! I don't know anything.

STEVE

But that's not what Mr. Hunter says. He says that you were a big part of what went down. A big part of what happened with Tammy Chung.

PRISCILLA

I'm not!

STEVE

That's not what Mr. Hunter says.

PRISCILLA

But it's not my fault.

STEVE

What? What isn't your fault?

PRISCILLA

That Tammy died. That wasn't my fault.

STEVE

Who's saying it's your fault?

PRISCILLA

Everybody! Everybody in my whole fucking school.

STEVE

What?

PRISCILLA

Everybody says that if I had just kept my stupid mouth shut, if I hadn't let Mr. Hunter read my poem, then Mister Hunter would never have said those things and Tammy wouldn't have killed herself. Everyone's saying that I'm a killer.

STEVE

Do you think you're a killer?

PRISCILLA

No! And I don't think Mr. Hunter is either, but that's not what everyone says.

STEVE

And that's why Mr. Hunter needs you. So you can get up in front of the hearing and let people know that he isn't a killer, that he didn't say those things. You're the only one who knows the truth, Priscilla. You're the only one who knows what he really said.

PRISCILLA

What are you talking about? Everyone knows.

STEVE

They do.

PRISCILLA

Yeah.

STEVE

And those girls are telling the truth? He told her she should go kill herself?

PRISCILLA

No!

STEVE

Off herself. Slit her wrists, whatever.

PRISCILLA

He didn't say any of that.

STEVE

Okay.

PRISCILLA

He said...he just said that she was a waste of air.

STEVE

That's all.

PRISCILLA

Yeah, and that she was taking up space in his class that someone else could fill - because there's always a waitlist for Mr. Hunter's class - and that she had never contributed a single positive thing since the beginning of the school year. He said that she should do us all a favor and stop coming to class.

STEVE

I can understand that--

PRISCILLA

And stop coming to school and just stop. He said she should just do us all a favor and stop breathing.

STEVE

Oh.

PRISCILLA

He never said she should kill herself.

STEVE

Just that she should stop breathing.

PRISCILLA

Yeah.

STEVE

Which eventually leads to...

PRISCILLA

I know! I'm not stupid.

STEVE

Okay.

PRISCILLA

But she deserved it.

STEVE

Do you really think so?

PRISCILLA

You don't even know what she said to me first. What she was did to me every day. I couldn't open my mouth in class, or she would find a way to twist it around to make everyone think I was some dirty slut. She put used condoms in my bookbag. My dad found them. And Mr. Hunter... Mr. Hunter stood up to her. He's a good guy.

STEVE

I know.

PRISCILLA

I don't know why all these people are saying this shit about him now.

STEVE

They want someone to blame.

PRISCILLA

But it's not Mr. Hunter's fault and it's not mine. It's Tammy's. She did this to herself, she did it to all of us.

STEVE

It's just...it's hard to be mad at the dead person.

PRISCILLA

I know.

STEVE

I think people need to hear what you have to say.

PRISCILLA

They do?

STEVE

I mean, maybe not exactly like you said it to me. You could always lie about it a little bit.

PRISCILLA

How?

STEVE

You could say that he didn't say any of those things. You could say that the other girls are just making it up.

PRISCILLA

But they're not. He said things he shouldn't have said, and everybody knows it. Everybody was there.

STEVE

Everybody?

PRISCILLA

Like thirty people.

STEVE

It's your word against theirs.

PRISCILLA

One against twenty nine?

STEVE

We can probably get better odds than that. I mean, I bet there are other people who will back up what you say.

They'll switch their stories if you just talk to them. I bet there are a bunch of other people who like Mr. Hunter better than the sub.

PRISCILLA

The sub smells like cat piss.

STEVE

And maybe there are other people out there who think Tammy was a bully. Who were glad that Mr. Hunter stuck up for you. Maybe there are other people who are actually glad that she's gone.

PRISCILLA

Maybe.

STEVE

So? Why don't you talk to them? Get them to change their stories. If you can get enough people to back you up, maybe you won't even have to testify. Maybe they'll all do it for you.

PRISCILLA

No one's going to listen to me. The whole school already thinks I'm a killer.

STEVE

Then you've got to embrace that.

PRISCILLA

What do you mean?

STEVE

If everyone thinks you're a killer, then be a fucking killer! Do some dangerous shit, get scary, take that on.

PRISCILLA

Seriously.

STEVE

Seriously. You know what everyone thinks I am?

PRISCILLA

A creep?

STEVE

Yeah, and a drunk. So now you know what I did? I went out and got a job to do that full time.

PRISCILLA

I thought you were disappearing.

STEVE

And that's where I'm headed. I found someone who's going to hire me to just drink tequila and party all day long.

PRISCILLA

My dad would like a job like that.

STEVE

A lot of people would. But not everyone gets to, because it's not their essence. That's the key, that's what no one tells you in school, you have to embrace your essence. If you're a killer, be a killer!

PRISCILLA

Yeah?

STEVE

Yeah. And you know what Mr. Hunter's essence is? You know what everyone thinks he is?

PRISCILLA

What?

STEVE

An English teacher.

PRISCILLA

Yeah.

STEVE

So just, help the guy out, will you? Lie, cheat, threaten people, whatever. The guy got the girl who was fucking with you to go kill herself. Don't you think you owe him? Don't you think the least you can do is get the guy his job back?

PRISCILLA

Yeah?

STEVE

Embrace it, kid. For him?

*Lights.*

## SCENE 8

*The hearing.*

PRISCILLA

I got something I want to say about Mr. Hunter. You said that people can get up and say something? I want to do that, if it's okay.

Mr. Hunter, he's a good teacher. He's smart, and he's funny,

and he listens to people. He's about the best teacher that I ever had. And that's the truth.

Some people have been calling Mr. Hunter a killer. And some people have called me a killer, too. Maybe not in this room, but outside. And it's all because of what happened with that Tammy Chung. So I thought I should come up here and set it straight.

Back at the start of the school year, before Tammy died, I took a pass from my Creative Writing class one day and went to the bathroom for a break. I didn't think there was anyone else in there, but then at the last sink I saw Tammy Chung. She had one of those metal pop-tops from a Coke can and was scraping it along the inside of her arm, until blood started to gushing all over the place.

I practically fainted because I'm not good with blood, and then Tammy saw me and pulled down her sleeves real fast. But not before I'd seen it. She always wore long sleeves, and after that I knew it was because of that. They were all scratched up, red marks and lines all up and down the insides.

Tammy ran out of the room before I could think of saying anything. I used the bathroom and went back to class and Tammy wasn't there. But then later when I saw her in the hallway she just gave me a look like she wanted me to die. And after that day, Tammy just...she put me down any chance she could find. We only had two classes together, Precalculus and Creative Writing, and in math class at least no one really talked. But in Mr. Hunter's class, that's where things just started to get harder and harder. Because Mr. Hunter is always asking people what they think of things, and Tammy took any chance she could to take a dump on me. She made my life a nightmare. And I mean, I felt bad for Tammy, because obviously she had something going on, but she sure as hell didn't make it easy for me to worry about her feelings.

But I never told anyone about what I saw, and no one else ever knew. Not Mr. Hunter, not Tammy's friends, nobody. And these people who say Mr. Hunter is responsible they just want someone to blame. But I guess if you really want someone to blame, you can blame me. I knew she was cutting, and I kept my mouth shut because I was scared.

But don't blame Mr. Hunter, because all he ever did was try to stand up for me. He didn't know what kind of place Tammy was in. That day in class, after I read my poem and Tammy put me down and everyone laughed... all Mr. Hunter said to Tammy was that she should enjoy that moment. She should take that time, getting to be the popular girl, all those kids laughing at her joke, and she should remember it forever. Because for me, it was going to get better. I was smart and talented, and

that meant life was going to get much better than it was now. But for Tammy...that was it. That was the best it was ever going to be.

And Tammy went home that night and...we know the rest of it. But Mr. Hunter didn't mean for her to do it, he was only trying to make her think. He didn't know how bad it was at her house. And those girls who are supposed to have put in their complaints about him? Where are they today? None of them are here to show their faces, because they all know they were lying. I talked to them. And you know what they told me? They said the principal told them to point the finger at him. The principal told them that the parents, the school board, needed someone to blame. I saw them, all lined up! She told them to say Mr. Hunter said all those things to Tammy. She called me into her office, too, started asking me all of these questions. Like she wanted, like she needed me to blame Mr. Hunter.

But I wouldn't do it, because the story isn't true. Mr. Hunter is a victim here. The only killer in this story is already dead, and the bad guys left alive aren't killers, just liars or cowards, like me. So please. Don't fire a good teacher because of a made-up story. Don't go blaming the one man who actually tried to help his students.

Thank you.

*Lights.*

## **SCENE 9**

*Diane's office. She is packing her things.*

MARK

Hey. Do you need help with anything?

DIANE

From you?

MARK

You don't have to be like that.

DIANE

I don't?

MARK

I did not want things to go down like this.

DIANE

I should hope not. I mean, I know you're completely selfish and morally bankrupt, but it would be pretty vindictive, even for you, if this were actually what you wanted.

MARK

Diane...

DIANE

Don't do that. Don't look at me like we're still friends.

MARK

I'm sorry.

DIANE

Fuck you.

MARK

Can we talk about this?

DIANE

There has been way too much talking. There's always been too much talking. Let's just agree to be quiet. Let's just agree to go our separate ways and never speak to each other again.

MARK

What are you going to do?

DIANE

Drink.

MARK

I mean it.

DIANE

I don't know! They don't make a place for principals who've gone off the rails. There's no rubber room where I get to bounce around until I land on my feet. I'm out on the street like anybody else. And in this economy...

MARK

I heard they offered you an assistant principal job in Chatsworth.

DIANE

Fuck that.

MARK

It's a good school, isn't it? And Assistant Principal, that might be an easier gig to balance with a young child.

DIANE

Have I ever complained about the balance?

MARK

No, but I'm just saying. You aren't being fired. It's a transfer. It could be a good opportunity. Clean the slate.

DIANE

It's fucking Chatsworth, Mark. There's no way I could ever get there on time in the morning. I would have to move!

MARK

So, you take a little time off, wait for something to open up closer to home. In the meantime, you spend some time with Asia. I mean, Phillip makes a good living, doesn't he?

DIANE

I had a good career.

MARK

I know.

DIANE

And Phillip doesn't make enough for me to just quit. Not with a new kid. I have to find...something.

MARK

You could back to teaching.

DIANE

It's not...I couldn't face them right now. After all of this? I don't think I have it in me to look into their little faces and believe...

MARK

What?

DIANE

That they are capable of learning.

MARK

I'm really sorry, Diane. Please believe me. I didn't know.

DIANE

About which part?

MARK

I didn't ask Priscilla to testify. I didn't tell her to say any of those things.

DIANE

She just decided to blame me all on her own.

MARK

Maybe you accidentally...planted the idea when you talked to her?

DIANE

So you're saying that I'm responsible?

MARK

No! No one is responsible. Priscilla...she's a kid.

DIANE

A kid that you manipulated.

MARK

I did not -

DIANE

You got her to lie to cover your ass. What kind of teacher does that make you? What kind of lesson is she supposed to be learning?

MARK

I didn't ask her to do any of that!

DIANE

Then who did?

(silence)

You know what, it doesn't matter, because when it came down to it, you didn't stand up for the truth, either, and that makes you just as guilty.

MARK

It does?

DIANE

She stood up and lied for you and you got your job back. Congratulations.

MARK

I would never have let her do it if I'd known it would end up like this.

DIANE

Really.

MARK

Yes, really!

DIANE

Because we were both in that hearing. We both watched her throw me under the bus. You had every opportunity to stand up for me then.

MARK

But I needed her testimony.

DIANE

Even if it was a lie.

MARK

It wasn't a lie.

DIANE

You think that I manipulated those children? You think that I scapegoated you?

MARK

I think...something tragic happened on your watch and you needed to find someone to take the blame.

DIANE

I stuck my neck out for you.

MARK

You did?

DIANE

I pushed this investigation forward, and when I saw where it was going I...warned you about the hearing. I warned you it would turn out badly.

MARK

And yet, you didn't stand in the way.

DIANE

(after a beat)

Do you even feel guilty?

MARK

Of course I feel guilty! I feel terrible about you losing your job. And if I could go back in time...

DIANE

Not for that. For Tammy.

MARK

What?

DIANE

Do you feel guilty for telling Tammy Chung that she should kill herself.

MARK

I didn't...I don't...

DIANE

We both know that you did, Mark. I know that you said those things and I'm also pretty sure you knew from her writing what kind of fragile place she was in. But it's over now. You're off the hook. You've been cleared of all charges. You don't need to hide behind the "I was taking it as fiction" defense anymore.

MARK

I didn't --

DIANE

Please! Don't give me that, "It's a muddle" bullshit, either. Because unless you have early Alzheimer's, you do know. You know whether you said those things and you know whether you meant them. Three hundred Priscilla Carerros standing up and saying that it didn't happen aren't going to change that.

MARK

No.

DIANE

No, what?

MARK

No, I don't feel guilty.

DIANE

Wow.

MARK

I did, at first, back at the beginning, but after the time I spent in that room, the time I've had to think...

DIANE

Mark...

MARK

Do you?

DIANE

Of course!

MARK

Why?

DIANE

Because she was my student. And I know that if I looked back, if I really looked...there's probably something I could have done.

MARK

You were barely back from maternity leave.

DIANE

I can't use that as an excuse.

MARK

There's no way you could have known what was going on. You have a thousand students.

DIANE

But I knew who Tammy Chung was. We all knew what was happening with her.

MARK

Yeah, she was a bully.

DIANE

Kids only bully when someone's bullying them.

MARK

You didn't kill her, Diane. She did it to herself.

DIANE

Because we let her.

MARK

You weren't her counsellor. You weren't her teacher.

DIANE

No, I'm just the one who hired those people. I hired the person who pushed her over the edge.

MARK

I've thought about this long and hard, and I... What I did was come to the defense of a student in need. I did what anyone would have done in my position.

DIANE

I don't think that's true, Mark.

MARK

I can't be responsible for the outcome.

DIANE

But you're a teacher. You can't just take the position of some innocent bystander. It's your job to guide them, to set an example.

MARK

And that's exactly what I was trying to do.

DIANE

*(beat)* This is the story you've chosen for yourself.

MARK

Tough talk is the only thing that gets through to these kids sometimes. By the time they get to me they are already fully formed. I can show them new things, I can open their eyes to other worlds, but I'm not responsible for how they react.

DIANE

Because you take everything they write as fiction.

MARK

It's the only way we can survive it! That's what I learned in the rubber room, Diane. We have to take care of ourselves, first. If you start to care, to really, genuinely care for them, like they're your own...?

DIANE

But don't you think that's what happened?

MARK

When?

DIANE

With Priscilla. Don't you think maybe you took it too personally? Don't you think maybe that's where you went wrong?

MARK

With defending her.

DIANE

Yeah.

MARK

(beat)  
Is that how you feel?

DIANE

What do you mean?

MARK

My first year teaching, I was underwater, and you could have let me fail. I would have washed out, and none of this would have happened. But you didn't. You stood up for me. You got me back on my feet.

DIANE

I thought you had potential.

MARK

And you made a huge impact.

DIANE

So then what...happened?

MARK

With us?

DIANE

With you. When did you turn into this person? When did you become this selfish, cynical...?

MARK

You really think I should have chosen you over my student?  
Called her a liar and defended your honor?

DIANE

No, not over your student, just over yourself.

MARK

Would you have done that for me?

DIANE

Yes. I would have. If it had been the truth.

MARK

But that hearing was never about the truth. It was about...

DIANE

It was about Tammy.

MARK

Yes.

DIANE

And somebody had to go down.

MARK

Yes.

DIANE

And you decided you were okay if that person was me.

MARK

I'm sorry.

DIANE

(beat)

Will you get out of my office now?

MARK

I really am sorry, Diane. I didn't want...I didn't think...  
any of this would. And if it did, I thought you could fight  
it. I thought that later on-- I just wanted to--

DIANE

It's okay, Mark. You can be quiet now. (beat) It's over.  
(pause) You won.

*Diane picks up a box and walks out of  
the office. Mark stands alone in the  
room.*

*Lights.*

## SCENE 10

*Mark's classroom. Shortly after the incident. Priscilla sits alone at her desk, shell-shocked. Papers and books are strewn across the surface.*

*Mark approaches.*

MARK  
Priscilla.

PRISCILLA  
Yeah?

MARK  
Are you okay?

PRISCILLA  
I think so.

MARK  
The bell rang a few minutes ago.

PRISCILLA  
Oh. Okay.

MARK  
I have a prep period, so I don't need to kick you out, but maybe you have to get to another class?

PRISCILLA  
Social Studies. Mrs. Price.

MARK  
The second bell is going to ring any second. If you leave now you can still make it.

PRISCILLA  
Is it cool if I just sit here for a minute?

MARK  
Sure. *(beat)* Take your time. I can write you a note, whenever you're ready to go.

PRISCILLA  
Thanks.

MARK  
I'll just tell Mrs. Price that I kept you late to go over an assignment. She'll understand.

PRISCILLA

Oh. Okay.

MARK

As long as you don't have a test or anything.

PRISCILLA

No.

MARK

Okay. Then it's fine. You can stay.

PRISCILLA

Okay.

MARK

Is there anyone from this class who's going to...?

PRISCILLA

What?

MARK

Should I call Mrs. Price now before she starts looking for you?

PRISCILLA

*(shakes her head)*

There's just like two people. They won't say anything.

MARK

Okay, good. That's good.

*(silence. He checks the hallway)*

The coast is looking pretty clear.

PRISCILLA

I'm not scared of going out there.

MARK

Okay.

PRISCILLA

I just need a minute to think.

MARK

And I told you, that's fine.

PRISCILLA

Do you think Tammy's going to be okay?

MARK

Tammy?

PRISCILLA

I mean, I don't know. I don't know her really, but I think she might be a little upset about what you said.

MARK

I don't think you need to worry about Tammy.

PRISCILLA

I don't?

MARK

I lost my temper. But I'm sure it isn't the first time anyone has yelled at Tammy Chung.

PRISCILLA

I think she was scared.

MARK

Seriously. Tammy is not for you to worry about.

PRISCILLA

Okay.

MARK

You're the only person we should be worried about here.

PRISCILLA

You don't need to worry about me.

MARK

Okay. Well, I really appreciated your poem today. That's what I wanted the class to hear. I'm sorry if it turned into...something else.

PRISCILLA

It's okay.

MARK

No, it's not okay! Because I really think...you have something. You're a gifted writer. And you can see things, you see the world, see people, in a way that very few people... So it got me upset when they couldn't see it. I thought maybe I could make them appreciate it. Make them understand.

PRISCILLA

Thank you.

MARK

But I...well, that didn't really work out, did it? Anyway, I wanted to make sure you knew. How much I appreciate your voice.

PRISCILLA

Okay.

MARK

Have you thought at all about where you might be going to college.

PRISCILLA

College?

MARK

I don't know what your grades are like in other classes, or your SATs or anything like that, but based on your writing abilities I guess I just assumed that you'd be on a college track?

PRISCILLA

I need to work first. But my mom says she'll let me stay at home as long as I go to Junior College, get some of my credits done that way.

MARK

There are loans and scholarships you can apply for too, you know.

PRISCILLA

I know.

MARK

Look, I'm not your college counsellor, I don't want to interfere with your plans here. I just wanted to tell you that I think you have what it takes if you want to pursue a life as some kind of writer. So, you know, anything I can do to help. College advice, recommendation letters, just let me know.

PRISCILLA

Thank you.

MARK

That's why I lost my temper today. I just...I didn't want to let someone like Tammy to stop you from -

PRISCILLA

I think someone should talk to her.

MARK

About her behavior?

PRISCILLA

About how she's feeling. I think she should go to the nurse or something.

MARK

Tammy will be fine, trust me.

PRISCILLA

Okay.

MARK

Tammy has this entire school wrapped around her finger. Those other girls in here? Josephine, LaShonda, Kim-Ahn? They're huddling with her right now in the bathroom, telling her that I'm some sort of evil monster and not to listen to me. They're probably already plotting my demise.

PRISCILLA

Okay, but -

MARK

Trust me. They're not worth the time you spend thinking about them. I know these girls.

PRISCILLA

You do.

MARK

I was impressed by them, too, at your age. You think just because a girl is pretty and confident and willing to put others down that she's somehow more worthy than you are. But the truth is, when you get a little older? All that stuff she's got, that surface stuff, just cracks and wrinkles and falls away. And what's left is just the rotten core, and all of a sudden you realize there never was any there there. There was no depth, no feeling, no passion or strength. Only fears and insecurities about not being enough. Because honestly she's not. She's not enough. And she never will be anything more than just a pretty face.

PRISCILLA

Okay.

MARK

And pretty soon it won't matter who's pretty and mean, but who's funny and talented and smart. And the rest of us? We continue to rise. We leave her - we leave the Tammys of the world behind us in the dust.

PRISCILLA

Okay.

MARK

For you, Priscilla, it's going to get better. That's what I really wanted to say in class today. I don't know if it came out that way at all--

I heard you. PRISCILLA

You did? MARK

You said you liked my poem. PRISCILLA

I did. I did like your poem. I liked it very much. MARK

*Lights.*

*End of play.*