

Childhood Montana

By Mira Gibson

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Mira Gibson
91 Ocean Parkway #4C
Brooklyn NY 11218
(cell) 516 993 2208
miragibson@gmail.com

Characters

Wayne Miller: Age thirty-eight, father of Owen, owner and supervisor of a slaughterhouse and cattle ranch.

Owen Miller: Age eleven, son of Wayne, is mentally challenged and severely socially stunted so that it seems his mental age is 5 yrs. In terms of casting an actor, this person should have the acting vocabulary and research to portray Aspergers syndrome, though that is not the pronounced mental handicap. (This role can be played by a young woman who can be made to look like a boy.)

Courtney Updike: Age twenty-eight, a legal secretary.

Bill Mason: Age forty-two, Owen's uncle, Wayne's brother-in-law.

Place

Phillipsburg, Montana.

Time

Present.

Author's note

Punctuation is used to indicate delivery, not to conform to the rules of grammar.

Stage directions in brackets () function as responses in lieu of lines.

(The setting is the living room of Wayne Miller's ranch house in Montana. Upstage center is the front door and the foyer alcove attached to the living room, stage right is the doorway to the kitchen offstage, upstage left is a mudroom. Just before the mudroom, downstage is the staircase that leads up to the second floor of the house offstage. The wall stage right has a fairly large window that light will shine through. The furnishings are dark oak. There is a plush couch center stage with some kind of fur throw draped over it, a wooden handmade chair, and a wooden handmade coffee table in front of the couch. There is a bearskin rug on the hard wood floor. On the walls are the mounted heads of various animals, moose, deer, bear, bison, elk, and a plethora of antlers, all in excess to the point of menacing. There are also taxidermist preserved wild animals around the living room, a stuffed raccoon, a stuffed opossum, a stuffed hawk, and a stuffed falcon. Somewhere there is a mantle, and above it is a shotgun on a rack. It is five o'clock and outside the window stage right the sun is beginning to sink low in the sky. **OWEN MILLER**, age eleven, mental age five, sits very quietly on the hard wood floor next to the bear head of the bearskin rug. He is small, quiet, and generally tries not to take up too much space. Owen continues to stitch and sew a bonnet for a moment. **WAYNE MILLER**, Owen's father age thirty-eight enters from the front door. Wayne is returning from working

outside as the ranch owner and supervisor of the slaughterhouse. At the sound of the door opening, Owen freezes and listens, and he jumps a little when Wayne slams the door shut. As Owen slowly turns to look at his father who takes off his coat and hangs it near the door, Owen discretely places the bonnet and spool of thread into the mouth of the bear head on the rug.

Owen

Hi Daddy.

Owen watches his father as he crosses to the kitchen, and exits there. The sound of ice clinking into a glass can be heard and Wayne returns entering with a Whiskey drink in his hands. He looks around his home, in part admiring the decorum and in part checking to see that everything is where it was when he left the house earlier. Wayne sits down on the couch to relax a moment.)

Owen

Hi Daddy, did you have a good day?

Wayne

What are you doing there?

Owen

Nothing, Daddy.

Wayne

Is that right?

Owen

That's right, Daddy. Daddy, what did you do today?

Wayne

Did what I always do.

Owen
Daddy, did you feed the cows?

Wayne
Yes, Owen, I fed the cows, Owen.

Owen
Did you see Chester, Daddy?

Wayne
Owen, I saw all the cows, Owen. Owen, Owen.

Owen
Daddy -

Wayne
You know, I'd like to sit here and drink this without
you Daddy-ing me to death, can I have that?

Owen
Is Chester okay?

Wayne
How 'bout this, when Chester's dead I'll tell you.

*(Owen continues to stare at
Wayne.)*

Wayne
Chester's fine.

Owen
Daddy, can I take him out?

Wayne
Owen, not today, Owen. I'm expecting someone, Owen.
Owen Owen Owen Owen.

Owen
I've been inside all day. I've been thinking about
taking Chester out all day.

Wayne
I said no.

Owen
I've been patient all day.

Wayne
That's good, you haven't said "Daddy".

Owen
I just want to see Chester.

Wayne
Not now!

Owen
Just for a minute.

Wayne
Did you take care of the moths?

Owen
Yes.

Wayne
Did you clean your room?

Owen
Yes.

Wayne
Well, clean it again.

Owen
Daddy. Can I have a hug?

Wayne
Owen, I'm expecting someone. I've got to sit here and wait. I've got just about five minutes to sit here, with my friend here, and relax, it's that simple, and I do not want to waste this time arguing with you. Now take your needlepoint, and get on upstairs.

Owen
I don't have any needlepoint.

Wayne
It's right there, I can see it. Go on upstairs, Owen.

Owen
I won't be in the way if I'm out with Chester. I'll be way out in the field.

Wayne

Owen, look at me. Look me in the eyes. That is the oldest cow I have ever seen in my goddamn life. I should've slaughtered that cow a decade ago, but I haven't. I can't let you go out in the field because I can't let you go out alone in the field, and you know it. You can take her out tomorrow.

Owen

Him.

Wayne

It's a cow.

Owen

Him.

Wayne

It's a cow. Cow's a female.

Owen

Chester is a boy.

Wayne

Have it your way.

(Wayne rises to exit returning his empty glass to the kitchen)

Owen

I'll take him out, way out in the field so I don't hear it.

Wayne

That's ringing in your ears, the Doctor said so.

Owen

Not true, not true at all.

Wayne

(returns entering) Well, I don't hear anything. I don't hear anything here in the house and I don't hear anything outside while I'm overseeing the plant. Maybe I'm deaf, is that it? *(waits for an answer)* I'm not deaf, you're deaf.

Owen

I'm not deaf.

Wayne

I'm not deaf either.

Owen

I wanted to give him this. *(takes the bonnet out of the bear's mouth and puts it on the bears head)* I made it.

Wayne

(picks up the bonnet, turns it over in his hands)
Where'd you get this cloth?

Owen

Nowhere, Daddy.

Wayne

Don't you "nowhere Daddy" me, where did you get it?

Owen

Daddy, it's for Chester.

(Wayne grabs Owen by the arm.)

Owen

It's Mom's skirt.

Wayne

I know it's Jamie's skirt. *(releases Owen)* You keep away from your mother's things, you hear me? You stay out of her drawers and her trunks. Do you hear what I'm telling you?

Owen

Daddy, she's not here.

Wayne

What I'm about to say, I'm only saying because you're too stupid to understand: your mother is all I have left. And she isn't even here. You tell me, what the fuck am I gonna do? Huh? Upstairs with you.

(Owen opens his hand to receive the bonnet. Wayne looks at it,

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perturbed, and hands it down to Owen. Owen puts it on his head.)

Wayne

Come on now Owen. I'm expecting someone and I can't have you around when he gets here. Stand up, Owen, let's go.

Owen

What about Chester?

Wayne

Tomorrow.

Owen

Is it tomorrow yet?

Wayne

You are testing my patience!

Owen

You always say tomorrow!

Wayne

(grabs Owen by the arm and pulls him up to his feet)
Get upstairs! *(begins to pull him towards the staircase)* Don't be stupid! *(no answer)* If I take you upstairs you know how that's gonna go!

Owen

I need my thread!

(Wayne says nothing more while he drags Owen closer to the staircase.)

Owen

Are you gonna lock me in?

(Wayne and Owen exit up the staircase. Once offstage, their voices are heard upstairs, as the sounds of the door opening and shutting in a scuffle can be heard.)

Owen

(offstage) Don't lock me in Daddy! I won't come downstairs! I WON'T EMBARRASS YOU! Daddy! Daddy!

(Wayne comes back down alone. He waits and listens to hear if Owen will make more noise. He hears a creak on the floorboards above him.)

Wayne

SETTLE DOWN!

(Wayne sits down for a moment. He notices the spool of threat in the bear's mouth of the bearskin rug. He takes the spool in his hand and places it on the table near the couch. Wayne wrings his hands, growing nervous. He goes to a desk drawer, opens it, and pulls out a file of papers. He flips through them, but isn't comforted by this familiar habit. He sets it back in the drawer. He sits. He looks at his watch. He takes a sip of his drink. He goes back to the file and looks through the papers then tucks them neatly in the drawer and closes the drawer. He goes back to sit on the couch. He looks more nervous. He downs the rest of his drink.)

Wayne

It's all blood in the drain from here, isn't it, darling?

(Outside the sound of tires on gravel can be heard as a car pulls up the driveway.)

Owen

(offstage, upstairs) Mom! MOM!

Wayne

(looking up at the floorboards) THAT IS NOT YOUR MOTHER!

Owen
(offstage) MOM! I'M UP HERE!

Wayne
(looking up at the floorboards, furious) I WILL COME UP THERE SO HELP ME GOD!

*(Outside, the sound of a car door opening and shutting can be heard. A moment later there is a knock on the door. Wayne hesitates, listening to the floorboards above him. It is quiet. There is another knock on the door and a ring of the doorbell. Finally, Wayne crosses to the door and opens it. In the doorway stands **COURTNEY UPDIKE**, age twenty-eight. She wears a woman's business suit and high heels, which have gotten a bit muddy. She carries a briefcase. Wayne remains standing where he opened the door from and stares at her disbelievingly. She does not have room to come in so, awkwardly she stays standing beyond the doorway. Courtney is timid and seems skeptical that she's arrived at the correct house.)*

Courtney
Hello, I'm Courtney Updike from the law offices of Johnson and Overholt. Is, um *(she looks down and reads from a piece of paper in her hand)* Wayne Miller, here? Is that you?

Wayne
Yes, that's me.

Courtney
(extends her hand) Courtney. It's nice to finally meet you, Sir.

Wayne

I was expecting Edmund.

Courtney

Yes, well, I'm here with some paperwork for you to sign. Um, regarding the settlement of your case.

Wayne

Yeah, I figured that.

Courtney

(looks into the living room still feeling awkward that he has not invited her in) Well, I've got the paperwork with me. Signing it all will only take a few minutes of your time. *(pause, and smiles)* We may need a table.

Wayne

(continuing to scrutinize her) Come on in.

(Wayne finally steps aside. Courtney enters a shallow few feet into the foyer. Wayne closes the door behind her. She steps in a bit further, shrugs her shoulders, and smiles.)

Courtney

I've never before been quite this far out. I actually saw a moose. It was on the other side of the road than my car. This was right off the highway about a half hour ago. You are really far out, let me tell you, oh, I'm sure I don't have to tell you.

(Wayne leers at Courtney, looking her up and down as she continues.)

Courtney

It was on the other side of the road, and, my God, a big Mac truck hit it. I've never seen anything like that. Giant, massive body of a moose, taken down. I stopped. The truck stopped. The guy got out, and set up flares around the moose. Went back to his truck, came back with a shotgun. Shot the moose. Just like that. I've never seen anything like it. Then I took off driving. You've got a lot of land.

Wayne

Yes. I have got a lot of land.

Courtney

(laughs embarrassed) You do. Must be the heat and the drive, my head's a little... *(laughs)* Never mind. Can I use this table?

Wayne

Please.

(Courtney sits on the couch and places her briefcase on the table in front of her. She opens it and takes out a fairly thick stack of papers, which she sets beside the briefcase and thumbs through them.)

Courtney

(organizing the paper) Just give me a minute, here. They must have gotten a little jumbled in my briefcase.

(Wayne waits watching her, realizes she might take awhile, and exits to the kitchen and remains in there a moment. Upon Wayne's exit, Courtney looks up to watch him go, then looks around the living room. For the first time she notices the mounted animal heads and gasps a little under her breath. She continues to look around becoming more and more surprised at the volume of the animal heads, which are on every wall she turns to look at. Courtney grows nervous. She feels watched by all of the glassy eyes of the animal heads. She locks her eyes on one of the moose heads. She approaches it, and runs her hand down its long snout. Keeping her eyes on the moose she says, "Shhhhhhhh" and reaches for the shotgun above the mantle. She aims

the shotgun at the moose head and says, "Shhhhhhh, I can't stand to see you suffer". Then she makes the sound of a shotgun shot with her mouth as though she is killing the moose. She lowers the shotgun. Wayne returns with two drinks in his hands. Wayne and Courtney meet eyes as Courtney, in essence, is caught holding the shotgun. Wayne sets one of the drinks down on the coffee table.)

Wayne

Whiskey Sour. I made it for you.

Courtney

(placing the shotgun back on the rack) I really shouldn't drink while I'm working.

Wayne

Well. For me, when the end of the day comes, I want nothing more than to sit back *(sits down on the couch)* take stock *(he leans far back reclining)* and have a drink. *(he pats his lap)* Have a seat.

(Courtney is stunned and made aware that she has no reason to assume she is safe here.)

Wayne

Must be the last call of the working day, right? Five-thirty and all. Nice of you to come all the way out here, by the way.

Courtney

Oh, it's no problem. I actually can't stay very long. I'm sure you understand.

Wayne

Not going off to work on more things after this, are you?

Courtney

No.

Wayne

So enjoy your drink. It'll take some time for me to sign, won't it? Dot all the "i"s and cross the "t"s. Doesn't have to be such a chore, does it?

Courtney

I'll be driving at the very least. Thank you, though.

Wayne

You in A.A.? That what you're worried about?

Courtney

No, no I'm not in A.A.

Wayne

'Cause I'll take it right away from you if that's the case. *(reaches over for the drink)* Don't want you fallin' off the wagon because of me.

Courtney

No, I'm not falling off the wagon. It's fine, you can leave it there. I've just, I've got to find the top and bottom of this settlement. *(goes back to thumbing through the paperwork)*

(Courtney continues thumbing through the paperwork for a moment. Wayne notices after a moment she's stopped looking at the papers and her eyes have landed on the bear's head on the rug.)

Wayne

You seem to me like the kind of girl who likes to drink.

Courtney

That's not the case.

Wayne

You seem to me like the type of woman who'd like the excuse.

Courtney

I'm not sure what you mean by that, but I'm sure you're wrong.

Wayne

You seem to me like the kind of drunk that's got a flask in the glove compartment and breath mints in her purse.

Courtney

That's not a very nice thing to say.

Wayne

There's nothing wrong with being a drunk so long as you admit it when you're in the company of other drunks. Otherwise, *that's* not very nice.

Courtney

I can assure you, you have me all wrong.

(Courtney wraps her hand around her Whiskey Sour, then cradles it in her lap.)

Wayne

One thing I love about this place is the light. The light comes through that window and comes in down across the room, just like that *(motions the line with his hand)* every evening. The setting sunlight. With all the wood in here the light looks orange. You notice that? And then it lands. *(uses his hand to indicate the bear head)* And when the light and the angle are just right it seems to bring them to life.

(As Wayne says this, Courtney is drawn in attention to Wayne. She sips her drink and listens somewhat lured.)

Wayne

You know, we can't live without light. We'd go insane.

(Courtney notices a cloud of small moths in through the window stage right. She gasps at its beauty. Leaving her drink on the coffee table, she rises slowly out of her seat, and slowly tries to get a closer look.)

Courtney
What are those?

Wayne
Moths.

Courtney
There are so many.

Wayne
They're pests.

*(Courtney almost has her finger
tip on one of the moths and they
flutter away out of the window.)*

Courtney
Looks like a painting.

*(Courtney returns to the couch,
and has the papers ordered and a
pen in her hand.)*

Courtney
They're all in the proper order, sorry about that.
*(she places them on the table, pointing to the first
place to sign)* If you would please?

Wayne
You like deer?

Courtney
They're cute.

Wayne
I mean the taste.

Courtney
I don't eat meat.

Wayne
Oh, no *(truly laughs)* Does this case disgust you?

Courtney
No, Sir, not at all.

Wayne

This must be the dark side to you and your tree hugging, granola munching, fag waltzing hippy lifestyle, is that it?

(Courtney laughs.)

Wayne
What's so funny?

Courtney
You are.

(Courtney laughs and reaches for her drink. She drinks, a bit more relaxed.)

Wayne
Well, Edmund, you and Edmund kept me in business.

Courtney
Yes, we did. If you'll only sign these papers.

Wayne
You know you helped me keep my slaughterhouse up and running.

Courtney
I was only brought on for the tail end, getting signatures, but yes I know.

Wayne
My reputation is upheld. My meat is Grade A.

Courtney
Oh, I know. I've read the whole file.

Wayne
Grade A. Grade A, goddamn it!

Courtney
Grade A!

Wayne
Awfully nice of you, that's all I'm saying. Real nice.

Courtney
Just doing my job.

Wayne

Well if you ever want to go on out hunting, (*Wayne grabs his crotch*) I could show you a thing or two. I noticed you had quite a tight grip on that shotie. Thick barrel, wasn't it, girl? You don't have to eat what you kill. Killing's enough fun.

Courtney

(*sets her drink down*) No thank you, Mr. Miller.
(*extends pen to Wayne.*)

Wayne

I've a feeling about you.

Courtney

If I can turn your attention to these signature pages.

(*Wayne rises from his chair seat, and approaches Courtney. He adjusts his large belt buckle in her face, before sitting down uncomfortably close to her.*)

Wayne

(*takes the pen and looks at the pages*) What am I signing here?

Courtney

(*points to paper*) This agrees to the amount they're paying you.

(*Wayne signs.*)

Wayne

Your tits look great by the way.

Courtney

(*flips paper and points*) This acknowledges the mutually agreed upon printed retraction, you know, the retraction they must print that says your meat is Grade A.

(*Wayne signs.*)

Wayne

Grade A! I'm tipsy.

Courtney

(flips a few pages sure not to miss anything and points) The renewed contract with the defendant's restaurant.

Wayne

(signs) That's keeping me in business right there.

Courtney

(flips paper and points) And here.

Wayne

(looks at Courtney) What's this one?

Courtney

Uh, sign right here, please.

Wayne

(looks at the paper) Alright. *(he skims the paper without yet signing)*

Courtney

Simplified, that one just acknowledges that Mrs. Wilcox, well, that her death was the result of eating at the defendant's restaurant.

Wayne

I'm not the defendant, Courtney so why do I have to sign that?

Courtney

It's a standard acknowledgement.

Wayne

Acknowledging that my meat's questionable.

Courtney

Oh, no *(tries to lighten it up)* that's not how -

Wayne

If I sign that then I'll split the blame and my product's not to blame.

Courtney

I think maybe the wording here, because it's written with more legal terminology makes it seem -

Wayne

What does all the rest of it amount to if I sign that? That's... no, that's not right. How did that get in there?

Courtney

Like I said, I came onto this case at the tail end, I'm really only involved to get your signature.

Wayne

I am trying to keep my business and my reputation intact, I won't sign anything that leaves question.

(Wayne stands up to distance himself from the papers.)

Courtney

Mr. Miller, you really have to sign this. I've got to bring them all back.

Wayne

You go back to them and you tell them no.

Courtney

This is the settlement, Mr. Miller. This is it, this is what the court decided. You really must sign this. *(waits for Wayne to say something)* You came out on top, Mr. Miller, you won.

Wayne

Do you understand the situation?

Courtney

(looks at the papers then back at Wayne) Yes.

Wayne

I'm gonna need to speak with Edmund, why isn't he here with you?

Courtney

He's been in court today and didn't have the time, not that he doesn't have time for you, you are a very important client and we've taken your case very seriously, but the case has been concluded, we just need your signature.

Wayne

You a lawyer?

Courtney

I'm a legal secretary. (pause) I can't leave without your signature, Mr. Miller, please.

(Wayne thinks to himself for a moment, then picks up his glass and exits to the kitchen. Courtney sits, pissed. She stands and goes to peer around into the kitchen. She stands looking in the kitchen, though off stage Wayne is not looking back at her. She waits, tight lipped. She turns to one of the animal heads on the wall.

Courtney

This isn't going well. (pause) Any suggestions?

She composes herself and goes back to the papers. Then picks up her purse and the papers, opens her briefcase about to put the papers away when Wayne returns with another drink that he's started on.)

Wayne

You haven't touched your drink.

Courtney

I've drunk half of it.

Wayne

Don't like the way it tastes?

Courtney

I like the way it tastes just fine, I've drunk half of it, haven't I? Are you blind?

Wayne

I'm not blind. You're blind.

Courtney

I'm not blind.

Wayne

I'm not blind either. I'm dying here. *(pause)* Do you think, if you were in my position, that you would do what you're asking me to do?

(Wayne appears weak and troubled.)

Courtney

I see why you're hesitant, but it will look worse for you if you don't sign this. Edmund thinks this is reasonable. *(pause, leveling with him)* Wayne, you can't deny that Mrs. Wilcox ate meat from this farm, because the restaurant she ate at buys its meat from you exclusively. If you don't sign it, it will look like you either don't believe she died or don't care that she died. Many people were poisoned and Mrs. Wilcox died. Speaking for Edmund, for the sake of your business, you've got to be willing to take a little responsibility. Bill Mason's restaurant is taking the brunt of this.

Wayne

He should take the brunt of this. You gotta cook a burger. If you don't cook it, it *is* poison.

Courtney

The meat was cooked.

(Wayne thinks about his predicament. He goes and sits on the chair, leans back, and drinks. He thinks a moment. Courtney resumes her seat on the couch. She clearly presents the last page Wayne must sign on the table and sets a pen in front of him on the table.)

Wayne

Where are you from? Missoula?

Courtney

No, I'm not from Missoula.

Wayne

Seems like you might be. Seems like you're from a city with an airport.

Courtney
I am from a city with an airport.

Wayne
Well?

Courtney
Queens.

Wayne
That New York? What you doing out here?

Courtney
(guards herself) Thought I might like it.

(The setting sun has reached an angle low enough in the sky to inundate the room with stark orange light.)

Wayne
Big Sky Country, it's what we call it. The State of Montana. The sky touches horizon to horizon. Look to the west, the sky meets the land. Look to the east, the sky touches the land. It's just you and the sky out here.

Courtney
Mmmmm. Hmmm.

Wayne
Am I a murderer?

Courtney
This settlement does not indicate-

Wayne
Forget the settlement. Am I a murderer?

Courtney
It was an accident.

Wayne

If someone dies at your hand, and you're not a murderer, then what are you?

Courtney

Selfish. I don't know.

Wayne

It's not my business practice to produce meat that's bad. It's not my practice. I've got to be maybe the last standing ethical rancher out here. How can I believe this, when I take care of them. I take care. Any given day of the week I've got as few as five hundred cows out there. You know, I stop working with the boys that run in sick cows? If I get a bad batch, I'll stop taking from whoever's running in to me sick cows. I've got ethics up the ass. I feed them, keep them hydrated, move them around. It's the worst thing to me when they get sick, you know if I've got a handful of them that are sick. Things fall to the wayside in my mind until they're well and healthy.

Courtney

The sick cows, how do you make them healthy?

Wayne

Antibiotics.

Courtney

Do they always get better?

Wayne

Most of them hang on and come around.

Courtney

The ones that don't get better, do you let them wander off and die? Do they wander off and die by themselves? Do they hold it together until it's night and you're in the house, and then go off on their own, to die?

Wayne

A cow doesn't have the sense to die in peace like that, it's too stupid.

Courtney

What would happen if you just let it be sick and die on it's own?

Wayne

You'd be an idiot. It'll stay in the heard and infect the rest. If it's really sick, really sick like that, you gotta shoot it in the head. There's no two ways about it.

(The moths again come fluttering in through the window.)

Courtney

There they are again.

Wayne

Christ, those moths doesn't have the good sense to be a moth. It should pester us at night with the other moths. Instead it's out in the daylight.

(Wayne rises and turns on a bug zapper light that hangs near the window.)

Courtney

Oh, don't do that.

Wayne

It's dusk now, the bugs will be too much.

(The heavy sound of a thud can be heard from upstairs where Owen was left. At the abrupt noise Courtney jumps and looks up.)

Courtney

Something fall over?

Wayne

The dog.

(pause.)

Wayne

I put him up there when I have company.

(Wayne and Courtney remain looking at each other. Courtney is reminded she has no reason to believe she is safe here. Wayne is

reminded Courtney could leave at any moment.)

Courtney

It's getting late. I've really got to go. You know I need you to sign that.

Wayne

(crosses to the table and picks up the last paper to be signed) There are plenty of places in the Big Sky Country of Montana that could buy from me. Plenty in the rest of the country, too. But they don't. My business is gonna go under. It can't take a blow like this.

Courtney

You sell meat. Someone will be there to buy it.

Wayne

The integrity's in how you kill it.

Courtney

Can we cut the shit? I'm tired! I'm getting a headache! I have to feed my cat!

(Courtney goes over to the bug zapper and flips it off.)

Courtney

We both know that I'm not leaving without your signature, and you seem to be enjoying that aspect!

(Wayne rushes towards Courtney and braces her against his body, groping her.)

Wayne

I've been dying to grab you.

Courtney

Stop -

(Wayne kisses Courtney, though she struggles. From upstairs there is another loud thud. Wayne continues to grope Courtney ravishing her against the wall. Courtney is

unable to speak or scream because all of her might is being put into trying to push Wayne off of her. The sound of Owen running across the floor above their heads is heard. Owen enters down the staircase, and sees Wayne and Courtney.)

Owen

I forgot my thread.

(Owen crosses to the bear head to check its mouth. He then spots the thread on the table and takes it in his hand. Wayne lets go of Courtney entirely.)

Wayne

Owen.

(Wayne quickly goes to Owen, gently grabs him still, but Wayne takes his hands off him so that he doesn't seem out of control. Wayne tries to calmly and discreetly talk to Owen.)

Wayne

Owen, buddy, I need to you stay upstairs, we're almost done down here.

Owen

I found it.

Wayne

(quietly) Owen, do you hear me?

(Owen finally notices Courtney. He stares at her then directs his statements at her.)

Owen

I'm going to go ahead and go outside.

Wayne

No you're not, Owen.

Owen

I think I'm going to go ahead and go outside for the rest of the day now. I'm going to go. *(he reaches the front door all the while directing these statements to Courtney)* I'm going. *(he puts his hand on the door knob)* I'm going. I'm gone.

Wayne

Owen, go on upstairs.

Owen

I'm going.

Wayne

Go on, if you're going to go.

Owen

(remains) I'm going.

Wayne

Owen!

Owen

Daddy?

Wayne

Owen, get upstairs!

Owen

Daddy?

Wayne

Owen, get your ass upstairs!

Owen

Daddy? Daddy?

Wayne

I am not doing this with you Owen!

(The sun has sunk below the horizon and only dim light is cast through the windows into the room.)

Owen
(yells) MOM!

*(Wayne approaches and grabs Owen.
Owen calls for his mother again
then just begins screaming.)*

Wayne
Come on, Owen, keep it together.

*(As Owen continues to scream,
Wayne lifts him, quickly carries
him to the couch, and places him
down somewhat roughly. Owen
begins to kick his legs, not at
Wayne, but randomly, as Wayne
holds him down.)*

Courtney
Oh, my God!

Wayne
(to Courtney) Get his legs! *(struggles with Owen)* Hold
his legs or he'll hurt himself!

*(Wayne treats Courtney in the
following pages as though she is
familiar to him.)*

Wayne
Get over here, Jamie, he'll kick me in the face again!

*(Courtney is stunned with shock
and does not move, as Owen
continues to scream and thrash.)*

Wayne
I'm not doing this all on my own again! Hey! *(looks
over at Courtney)* Do you hear me? We're in this
together!

*(Courtney continues to stare at
Owen.)*

Wayne

I can't hold him by myself! It's just a tremor, Jamie, come on now! Hey! Do you hear me?!

(Courtney does not move. Owen continues to scream for a moment.)

Wayne
(to Owen) Relax, Owen, just try.

(After a long moment of continuing to scream Owen stops exhausted. His body relaxes and he closes his eyes. As his face rolls to the side, a slight trail of blood comes out of his nose and slides down his cheek. Wayne stands up finally, exhausted himself.)

Wayne
(to Courtney) What the fuck was that!?

Courtney
(confused) Is he okay?

Wayne
(angry) Why couldn't you give me a hand?

Courtney
I, I-

Wayne
What? Am I raising him by myself?! You know the doctor said we have to keep him down when he starts? You've been tuning out on me!

Courtney
I've never seen anything like that, I don't know what to do!

Wayne
Oh, you've never seen anything like it? What about yesterday? And the day before?

Courtney
I've never been here before!

Wayne

You're crazy, girl!

Courtney

Mr. Miller! I am here to get your signature!

(Wayne tries to absorb what Courtney is saying, but it is jarring.)

Courtney

I've never seen that kid before! Are you confusing me with someone?

(Wayne shuts down a bit.)

Courtney

Maybe I -

Wayne

Shut up. *(beat)* Owen!

(Owen pretends to be passed out. Courtney approaches Owen for a closer look.)

Courtney

Should I call for an ambulance?

Wayne

No. Owen! Get up!

(Wayne is just standing over Owen, yelling. Ineffectively, though. Owen remains pretending to be passed out.)

Wayne

Owen, now I mean it. You are going to get up.

Courtney

He can't.

Wayne

Shut up!

(Courtney is startled and shuts up.)

Wayne

Owen. Get up and go upstairs before I drag you there
by your ears. OWEN!

(Wayne is completely enraged and charges at Owen who pretends to be passed out on the couch. Courtney moves so that she is between Wayne and Owen. Courtney and Wayne stare at each other for a beat. Wayne quickly walks to the cabinet, opens a door on it, and grabs an incredibly large and sturdy knife, with which he turns abruptly towards Courtney. Courtney braces herself, eyes closed, to be hacked. Wayne goes quickly from the cabinet to the front door and out of the house exiting. The door slams behind him. Courtney is shocked by all that has happened. Owen does not move and pretends to be asleep. Courtney looks back to the front door. It's quiet. She remembers her purse and gets it, opens it. She's nervous and still badly shaken.)

Courtney

(under her breath) Okay.

(She takes out a bottle of pepper spray.)

Courtney

(under her breath) Okay.

(She shakes the bottle, pops the cap off, and holds onto it tightly, ready. She waits. She looks at Owen, looks at the front door, and listens. Her heartbeat has calmed down. Courtney begins to cry a little to herself. She sits at the opposite end of the couch as Owen.)

Courtney

I'm afraid. *(nods to herself)* Scared. *(closes her eyes and rocks back and forth slightly)* How did you do it? When I'm so scared. How did you want to do it? So scared. *(pause)* I miss you so greatly. You should've killed me first. *(opens her eyes after a beat)* I coulda gone anywhere on the map.

(The moths flutter in through the window. It catches Courtney's attention. Her eyes dry a bit looking at it. Courtney rises and goes to the moth.)

Courtney

(to the moth) My boyfriend. Killed himself. In our apartment. *(beat)* He never saw a so small as you.

(After a beat, Courtney quietly walks to the front door and listens against the door for any noises coming from the other side, but cannot hear anything. Owen stops pretending to be asleep. He opens his eyes and sits up on the couch.)

Owen

Were you speaking with Milton?

Courtney

I don't know who that is.

Owen

The bison.

Courtney

I'm sorry?

(Owen points to the bison head on the wall.)

Owen

Milton. I named him. I named all of them.

Courtney

Are you okay?

Owen

(thinks, responds innocently) I'm okay. Are you okay?

Courtney

No.

Owen

Okay. I named all of them. All of the heads. On the wall. They weren't always on the wall. Milton used to live around the waterhole about eleven acres behind the house. Daddy thought he'd hurt the cows, so Daddy shot him. Milton used to come up to the cattle real close to tell them things.

Courtney

Where do you think Daddy is now?

Owen

Outside.

Courtney

How old are you?

Owen

Eleven.

Courtney

What happened to you a moment ago?

Owen

Tremor.

Courtney

Like a seizure?

Owen

Little lumps.

Courtney

Little lumps?

Owen

In my blood in my brain.

Courtney

Who told you that?

Owen

I'm thirsty. *(reaches his hand slowly forward towards the Whiskey Sour Wayne set out for Courtney)* I think I'll take a sip. *(looks at Courtney, still reaching slowly, then looks at the drink)* I think it will hit the spot. *(reaches, looks, puts his hand around the glass)* Oh, I've reached it.

Courtney

Stop.

Owen

I'm thirsty.

Courtney

Well, that's Whiskey. You want juice, I'm sure there's something in the fridge.

Owen

Why can't I have some?

Courtney

Because it will knock you on your ass.

(Owen looks at Courtney blankly. Courtney realizes that he's not going to understand everything that she says. Courtney looks in her purse and takes out a tissue. She hesitates, then approaches Owen and hands him the tissue.)

Courtney

You have a little, um, wipe your nose, please.

(Owen blows his nose, wipes the blood away that is under his nose.)

Owen

(looking into the tissue, holds it up for Courtney to see) See? Little lumps.

Courtney

(doesn't look) Yeah, keep blowing.

(Owen keeps blowing. Courtney takes the Whiskey Sour and finishes it right quick. As Courtney takes a cigarette out of her purse, she asks)

Courtney

What's the likelihood your Daddy's gonna come back here and murder us?

(Owen stares at her blankly. Courtney smokes.)

Courtney

You say you're eleven?

Owen

Yes.

Courtney

Yes, you're eleven.

Owen

Yes.

Courtney

Yes.

Owen

Yes.

Courtney

Owen, are you okay?

Owen

The cows have it the worst. Even all those animals, they don't have it as bad as the cows. He tried to protect the cows so that's okay.

Courtney

Wayne did?

(Owen nods.)

Courtney

Do you know where he went?

Owen

He always comes back.

Courtney

Now, when he comes back, is he more in his right mind or more out of his mind?

Owen

I named that one Milton.

Courtney

Is Wayne gonna kill me if I go to my car and get my cell phone?

Owen

Milton is a bison.

Courtney

Is your nose bleed better? Let me see. *(she tips his chin up to take a look.)* You were calling for your mom-

Owen

Milton told the cows things.

Courtney

What did he tell the cows?

Owen

Oh, I don't know, stuff about the mountains maybe. An escape route maybe. Bison stuff. Stuff a cow could use.

Courtney

Does your dad know about all this?

Owen

Oh, yeah. All these guys got put up real fast. Before it was all pictures of Mom. Do you want to start a sewing club? I can show you the hides. They're in my room.

Courtney

Owen, do I look like your mom?

Owen

There used to be big pictures of her all over the house. Now they're the heads all over the walls. All where the pictures used to be. I wish the pictures would come back. Sometimes I put the hides near the heads to see if they'll run away.

Courtney

I think it would be a good idea if I went to my car and called Edmund. Would you come with me?

Owen

I don't want to go out there.

Courtney

Why not?

Owen

We should go upstairs for sewing club.

Courtney

Why don't you want to go outside?

Owen

It's dark out.

Courtney

My car is just twenty-five steps or so from the front door there. It's close. Let's try. Really, I want you to be real with me. Did you see that knife your Daddy had?

(Owen shakes his head.)

Courtney

Because your eyes were closed. Do you know what I'm talking about?

(Owen nods.)

Courtney

What does he usually do with that knife?

Owen

Sharpen it.

Courtney

Anything else?

Owen

He sharpens it a lot. And cleans it. And sharpens it.

Courtney

Why does the knife need to be so sharp, do you think?

*(Owen looks down at the ground
sadly.)*

Courtney

Does Daddy kill your friends with the knife?

(Owen nods.)

Courtney

Is there a phone here?

Owen

No.

Courtney

Is there a bathroom here?

Owen

No.

Courtney

Really?

Owen

No. The screaming is going to start. We should go upstairs for sewing club.

Courtney

What screaming?

Owen

I think I feel like rolling on the floor. I think I'm going to roll on the floor. I'm going to go and try.
(kneels down, looks at Courtney) I'm going. I'm going to roll on the floor.

Courtney

Don't roll on the floor.

Owen

(as she says her last line) Okay. I think I'm going to put on one of the heads. *(crosses to the heads on the wall)* I'm going. *(reaches for a head)* Here I go-

Courtney

Owen!

Owen

Can I roll on the floor?

Courtney

No!

Owen

Can I fix myself a drink?

Courtney

No! Listen to me!

Owen

Are we going to start sewing club?

Courtney

Listen to me! I know best! I know best! Do you understand that? You have to listen to me and do what I say, do you understand?

Owen

What's your name?

Courtney

Courtney!

Owen

I love you.

(Owen grabs and embraces Courtney. He holds her to him and kisses her passionately. Courtney neither accepts nor resists this. It's entirely a split second then Owen pulls back.)

Owen

I don't feel... *(trailing off, then snapping back to himself)* I'm dizzy, I- *(his eyes seem to go blank as though he cannot see, he grabs Courtney's arm)*

Courtney

What's wrong? *(holds him and helps him towards the couch)*

Owen

Mom! MOM!

Courtney

Owen, let's get on the couch, calm down.

Owen

Do you hear it?! *(starts yelling)*

Courtney

(yelling over him) Hear what?

Owen

Screaming! *(he resumes screaming)* MOM!

Courtney

I'm here! I'm right here!

(Courtney seats him on the couch. Owen does not begin yelling as he did the time before. He looks at Courtney.)

Owen

You're bleeding. *(slowly extends his hand to her nose)*

Courtney

(wipes her nose with her hand) I'm not.

Owen

Wipe it away! Make it stop! *(roughly wipes at her nose and ears)*

Courtney

What are you doing, Owen? *(tries to hold his hands back)* Get away from me!

(Owen paws at her violently. She tries to push him back, but he persists. She grabs the pepper spray from her purse.)

Courtney

I'm warning you! Calm down!

(Owen continues to try to wipe at her face.)

Courtney

I'll spray you!

(Owen continues, and hits her in the face, not on purpose but as a result of trying desperately to wipe away the blood he sees on her face. Courtney sprays him in the face. She sprays him much longer and much more violently than is necessary, it's an assault on Owen and she is letting it out. Owen yells and screams in pain. He writhes on the floor. It takes a moment for Courtney to realize what she's done. She says, Oh God, and runs offstage into the kitchen and returns a moment later with a wet washcloth. She sits next to Owen quickly and carefully holds his face while trying to wash away the spray from around his eyes. He screams less and less and begins instead to cry. Courtney holds him and continues to blot his eyes with the wet washcloth. A moment passes.)

Owen

My eyes sting!

Courtney

I know, we have to flush them out with water.

Owen

My eyes hurt!

Courtney
This will help, hold still!

Owen
They sting! You're hurting me!

Courtney
I'm not trying to hurt you, I'm trying to help you!

Owen
It hurts!

Courtney
What were you hitting me for?! Huh?!

Owen
I'm sorry (cries)

Courtney
Keep crying, it'll help dilute the pepper spray.

Owen
I'm not supposed to cry.

Courtney
Yes you are, it's good to cry. I know best.

Owen
I'm not supposed to be a baby.

Courtney
Crying doesn't make you a baby.

*(Owen slinks into Courtney's arms
so she's holding him like a baby.)*

Owen
What does crying make you?

Courtney
What does crying make you...*(cradles Owen)* Crying makes
you someone that feels. You're in trouble if you don't
cry.

Owen
I feel hurt.

Courtney

I know. I fucked up.

Owen

(tries to cry) Courtney? *(waits for a response)*
Courtney?

Courtney

Yes?

Owen

I can't cry now.

Courtney

Do your eyes still sting?

Owen

Yes.

Courtney

Less?

Owen

Yes. I can't cry now, I've used them up.

Courtney

That happens too.

Owen

Courtney?

Courtney

Yes?

Owen

What's your Daddy like?

Courtney

He's not like much of anything.

Owen

Is he angry?

Courtney

Angry? No.

Owen

He's not angry?

Courtney

You know how to space out? You know if you let your eyes un-focus and you drift off into thought. Can you do it?

(Owen tries to space out his eyes.)

Owen

Yeah?

Courtney

That's how my Dad is. He's not angry. He's just not there.

Owen

Courtney, why are you here?

Courtney

This is where my boyfriend is. What about your Daddy? Is your Daddy angry?

Owen

Sometimes.

Courtney

Sometimes? Does he get angry at you?

Owen

No. Sometimes, but those are accidents.

Courtney

Accidents? Hmm. Are they accidents because he should get mad at someone else or are they accidents because he didn't *mean* to get mad?

Owen

He gets mad at the animals.

Courtney

What do the animals do to get him mad, do you think?

Owen

They're here. With us. On the land. Daddy says they're demanding.

Courtney
Because they have to be fed and all that?

Owen
Daddy says they're filthy and they take up space and they are blissfully unaware.

Courtney
Blissfully unaware? Sign me up.

Owen
Sometimes, when Daddy gets mad, he kills the animals.

Courtney
Isn't that his job?

Owen
One by one. He kills them one by one.

Courtney
You mean hunting?

Owen
It makes him feel better. He doesn't cry.

(Long pause.)

Owen
Have you seen the slaughterhouse?

Courtney
No.

Owen
The slaughterhouse has a big wheel, like a merry-go-round. The cows come around the corner and get chopped. Daddy says this is the humane way and I shouldn't be squeamish. He doesn't cry. I know the animals. I like to feed them. I like that part.

Courtney
That's the part I would like too.

Owen

I'm on their side.

Courtney

I'm on their side too.

Owen

I wish they'd escape. I just don't want them to be scared. I just don't want them to be scared. They know. They know what's going to happen when they come around the big wheel. So when they're in the field they should feel safe. But they can't, because Daddy gets angry and kills them one by one.

Courtney

With the big knife he had.

Owen

Yes. It's not fair. They should feel safe in the field. Not scared. Not scared. It's not fair. They're my friends.

Courtney

How are your eyes doing?

Owen

Okay.

*(Courtney puts her arm around Owen and snugs him into her. The front door opens. Courtney freezes. She holds Owen and leans him down to hide scrunched down in the back of the couch. **BILL MASON** enters, age forty-two, and the defendant in the case. He is wearing plain clothes and he carries two blood soaked burlap sacks of packed rancid meat, which are both quite large.)*

Bill

Anyone home? *(waits for a response)*

(It takes some effort, but he goes straight offstage into the mud room stage left, where he sets down the sacks. Courtney peeks

over the back of the couch and isn't sure what to make of the unknown person.)

Owen

(whispers to Courtney) Is that Uncle Bill?

(Bill returns to exit out the front door, never having seen Courtney or Owen.)

Courtney

(peeks again over the back of the couch) Is Uncle Bill a good guy or a bad guy?

(Owen does not respond.)

Courtney

Fuck!

(Courtney stands and grabs her purse, she keeps her hand on her pepper spray and puts that hand in her purse. She approaches the front door, and hesitates standing in the middle of the room in expectation of Bill. Owen remains on the couch. His eyes are cast down. He has lost the significant portion of his sight, but is not complaining. Bill returns again with two more sacks of meat.)

Courtney

Hello.

(Bill stares at her disbelievingly. Courtney is hesitant to speak.)

Owen

(still slouched hiding) Her name is Courtney.

Courtney

My name is Courtney. I work for Wayne's lawyer. I came to get his signature for a settlement. I'm not trespassing. Do you live here?

Bill

No, as a matter of fact, I don't. What'd you say your name was?

Courtney

Courtney Updike.

Bill

You look, I need to catch my heart here, it's beating so much, you look just like my sister.

Courtney

I've heard that.

Bill

It's unbelievable.

Courtney

It's strange for me too. I think, earlier, this is going to sound silly, I think Wayne for a moment mistook me for her.

Bill

For a moment I thought you were her. But you're not.

(Bill takes the sack, dragging it into the mud room and sets it next to the others. Bill again exits through the front door. Courtney takes her hand that was on the pepper spray out of her purse, empty. Bill returns with a third sack.)

Bill

I'm just returning some meat, here. Sorry to bother.

Courtney

You're not bothering me. I shouldn't be here.

Bill

I shouldn't be here either.

Courtney

I've been waiting here. With Owen. Wayne left.

Bill

He left? What are you still doing here?

Courtney

I don't know.

Bill

Huh.

Courtney

Look, Wayne has to sign one more document. I have to get his signature. I have to. Are you expecting him?

Bill

Like I said, I'm really not supposed to be here. I'm just dropping off this meat. It's bad. I don't want it in my restaurant. It's attracting roaches. Rats.

Courtney

Are you...um, who are you?

Bill

Bill Mason. I'm the restaurant that takes meat from Wayne and serves it to people like Mrs. Wilcox.

Courtney

Yes, I know, that's the case I'm here about. It had escaped my attention that you two were related.

Bill

Related by Jamie. Not anymore. I'm just dropping off this meat.

Courtney

And then you're leaving?

Bill

Sometimes I entertain myself with Owen, when I know Wayne'll be gone, but I wasn't planning on it this evening.

Courtney

Maybe you could? What were your plans, if anything?

Bill

How long've you been here by yourself?

Courtney

Not too long. *(beat)* I have to get his signature. I won't have a job tomorrow. If you would just wait with me and help me?

Bill

What does he got left to sign?

Courtney

It's a - um, a one page statement *(goes to it on the table and half read it)* that says that Wayne and Wayne's business acknowledge that it was the meat that came from his business and the processing of his meat or lack of Grade A processing that caused Mrs. Wilcox to die as a result of consuming it. *(hands paper to Bill)*

(Bills does not take the paper, but looks at it making no effort to read it.)

Bill

How long do you expect we'll be waiting?

Courtney

I was hoping you'd have some insight on that.

Bill

Where'd Wayne run off to?

Courtney

I really don't know.

Bill

You can't come back tomorrow?

Courtney

I have to file this tomorrow. I can't fuck this up. You'd be doing me a favor. I know you think there's no way of collecting on it, and I don't know if there's anything I can ever do in the future, but I just need this.

Bill

What makes you think I can help?

Courtney
Because you and me is more than just me.

Bill
Will you say, "Goodnight, brother." Will you say that?
(*waits for a response*) It would make my heart soar.

Courtney
Goodnight, brother.

(*Bill seems to fade into a dream
for a moment.*)

Bill
I'll stick around.

Courtney
(*sigh of relief*) Excellent. I can't tell you the night
I've had.

Bill
(*not hearing her*) Hey, there, Owen!

Owen
(*continues to look down, eyes unfocused*) Hi, Uncle
Bill.

(*Bill ruffles up Owens hair, Owen
recoils.*)

Bill
So what're we gonna do while we wait?

Courtney
You tell me.

Owen
(*to himself but with enthusiasm*) Let's play horsey!

Bill
You like to drink?

Courtney
I sure do.

Childhood Montana
By Mira Gibson

(Bill exits into the kitchen to get some glasses and a bottle. Owen makes an effort to look at Courtney and stretches out his arms.)

Owen
(whispers) Courtney.

Courtney
(whispers) You're okay.

Owen
(whispers) I'm okay.

Courtney
(whispers) Put your arms down.

Owen
(whispers) Okay. Courtney? I'm thirsty.

Courtney
(whispers) Okay. *(whispers)* Why are we whispering?

(Bill returns with two glasses and a bottle of Whiskey. There are a couple ice cubes in each glass. Courtney smirks awkwardly at Bill and exits into the kitchen to get Owen some juice. Bill sits and pours two drinks of Whiskey.)

Bill
Are you gonna say hello to me?

Owen
I said hello.

Bill
Must have missed that.

Owen
Did you see Chester?

Bill
It's dark out, Owen. She's nowhere near the driveway, I can't see that deep into the field.

Owen

Chester is a boy. You said "she" but Chester is a boy.

Bill

Whatever floats your boat.

Owen

He's a boy.

Bill

That woman remind you of anyone? She reminds me of someone. God I wish you had a clue.

(Courtney returns with a large glass of apple juice with ice in it and hands it to Owen. Owen takes it. Courtney sits next to Owen. Owen drinks the entire glass down in one long chug. Owen burps.)

Bill

Mind your manners.

Owen

Excuse me, Uncle Bill. Excuse me, Courtney.

(Bill hands Courtney a Whiskey.)

Bill

You're excused.

Owen

Uncle Bill?

Bill

Yeah Owen?

Owen

Can I be excused?

Bill

Take your glass to the kitchen.

(Owen rises and exits to the kitchen with his glass. He then crosses through the living room to the stairs stage left and exits ascending the stairs. His footsteps can be heard above Courtney and Bill's heads with the creaking of floorboards. Bill and Courtney sit in silence for a moment. In the awkwardness, Courtney drinks successive sips of her Whiskey.)

Bill

Owen's retarded. In case you were wondering.

Courtney

I could tell he's slow.

Bill

Well, it is what it is. I like to be up front about it.

Courtney

He seems to have a sense of humor about it.

Bill

Does he?

Courtney

I think so. He repeats things that he says. Things that you say. It's kind of charming.

Bill

That kid. Stupid.

Courtney

Do you know why he has those, um, tremors? Are they seizures?

Bill

That's just acting out. I don't buy any of it. He feels a bloody nose coming on and has a hissy fit.

Courtney

Hmm, seemed serious.

Bill

If he's in the middle of all that and you tell him it's time to ride Chester, he'll stand up and walk out the house, lickedy-split.

Courtney

He has quite a spirit. His spirit seems bigger than himself.

Bill

Is that right?

Courtney

But he seems lonely for his mother. He seems lonely for someone he used to have in his life. Someone that was there day to day. Everyday. And then, one day, without warning, they're gone from you. Like losing a limb you can still feel. You wake up in the middle of the night, for a moment you feel loss but can't place where it's coming from, and then it hits you, like death all over again.

Bill

Yeah?

Courtney

That's how Owen seems to me.

Bill

Yeah. Then one of those nights you wake up, and, it's you you've lost. Like your whole self is the limb. And you don't know what to do about it. Except you wanna sleep the rest of your life.

Courtney

I'm not doing the get to know you thing. I'm just going to know you already. That alright with you?

Bill

Sure. *(beat)* Jamie's been dead, three months now. Owen's got a terrible memory. I'm surprised he remembers her.

Courtney

How much do I look like her?

Bill

Your tits are bigger. That's the difference.

Courtney

Does my voice sound like hers?

Bill

Pretty much. You talk smarter.

Courtney

And we're the same height?

Bill

Yes, all that.

(Bill pours more Whiskey for himself.)

Bill

My sister was a knock-out.

Courtney

How did she die?

Bill

Got sick. She got so sick. Sick as I've ever seen a person. Sicker than a dog. A sick dog you can take out into the woods and shoot. Jamie, alls we could do was watch her. She was sick for five days, then dead.

Courtney

What was it?

Bill

See that meat I dragged in? It's rancid. There's not enough Borax in Montana to preserve meat that far gone. *(beat)* When you're a rancher, you and your family, live off the fat of the land. When Wayne met my sister, he had nothing. Was living in his grandmama's basement. When Jamie came to me and said she's getting married, I gave Wayne this ranch. I gave him a business. I gave him some fat some land so he had something to take care of my sister with. So he wouldn't have nothing. I bought meat from this ranch.

Kept him in business. Wayne let this place go. It's turned to poison. The machines are a mess. They're in no sanitary condition. There are rats everywhere, just nesting in carcasses.

Courtney

Because she died, and she was gone, he couldn't keep this place up?

Bill

Wayne sees what he wants to see and focuses on what he wants to focus on and that's the cattle and the killing. But the business is the meat. He should have focused on the meat. People eat meat. They don't give a crap about the cow, not the life and not the death.

Courtney

He wasn't running things properly even before she died?

Bill

Never ran things properly. He served her up some spoiled meat. Jamie ate it and she died. We shoulda run outta this town when we had the chance. I coulda been a boxer. *(beat)* You seem like you're from a different place entirely.

Courtney

I know.

Bill

Seems like if you had any sense in your head, you'd let yourself get fired tomorrow and get out of this State.

Courtney

I can't.

Bill

Maybe you're not as smart as you talk.

Courtney

Maybe.

Bill

People that are born here, they got enough against them. People that come here, there's a certain kind of

person that needs to live in the middle of nowhere, on thirty acres, where there's nothing but nothing. Except mountains and lakes. Why are you here?

(Courtney reaches for the bottle, but Bill takes it and pours her glass for her.)

Courtney

I know I drink too much.

Bill

What else is there to do?

Courtney

I'm from a city. *(pause)* My boyfriend was an artist. He was a good artist. He painted. I met him at a gallery. When we were living together, after awhile of living together, he stopped being able to paint. It wasn't in him. It's like he'd died. He used to tell me about his summers when he was a child. He'd come to Montana with his parents. The way he described it, it was so vivid. Our apartment had a large white wall. It was a blank canvas, even I could see that. One day to encourage him, I began to paint his childhood Montana on the wall. I'm no artist. The attempt was terrible, but he joined me. And we painted Montana. It was a mural. It had trees, and mountains, and deer, and rabbits, and a little boy running through a field, and it was beautiful and it was magnificent and it was real. *(beat)* I wanted to be in the mural.

Bill

Whereabouts did your boyfriend visit out here?

Courtney

I can't remember what towns. He only told me about one particular place, over and over, a grove near a pond. I couldn't get him to talk about anything else. He would get so dark. It was so beautiful in the mural, but then he wouldn't talk about what happened there. Only about the pond and the grove.

Bill

There's always one thing to latch onto, block out the rest. I used to sit in a tree, look out at the fog that was rising up off the water, dusk. The smell of

pine needles, everything quiet and still, felt safer than if I was in my mothers arms, never mind that my back burned with welts from my Daddy whipping me with a switch. There was awhile when me and Jamie were teenagers, we'd talk about leaving. We shoulda done it. This is a place you leave, not a place you come to.

Courtney

Why are you still here?

Bill

I got nothing to leave for. I got nothing to take with me. I would've left with Jamie. We were gonna go. I was gonna be a boxer in Las Vegas. Jamie was gonna run a bar. Teenage dreams. Then she met Wayne. And she wasn't going nowhere after that, has a baby that turns out to have learning problems. The country was made for hiding those kinds of defects. You don't seem defective.

Courtney

I am defective.

Bill

I think the same of myself. My whole self is the limb you feel though it's gone. In part you feel numbness, but in part you can feel the most excruciating pain. Sometimes I feel like there's some other self that's who I used to be that's with her. She's the past. And there's nothing I can do to get there. That's what death is. Death creates the past. It enables the present to become the past. The sister to become the memory. And if I claw my skin off I still won't get her back. *(beat)* Sometimes I cut my skin.

Courtney

That's not good.

Bill

I didn't know what I was hanging on for until this very moment.

Courtney

What do you mean?

Bill

Seeing you. I can get lost in it.

Courtney

Please don't.

Bill

(beat) I can't stay here like this. I've got to be heading home.

Courtney

But Wayne's not back.

Bill

Well. I can't stand the sight of you.

Courtney

What did I do?

Bill

It's a slap in the face.

Courtney

Can't you please stay?

Bill

You're my sister.

Courtney

I'm drunk now, you can't leave me.

Bill

You could mean my life again. But I have to know better.

Courtney

I can't drive, I can't leave, you have to help me, you said you'd wait with me! I can't lose my job I can't go back there to my apartment in the city! I can't! I can't! I want to stay in the mural!

(Bill goes over to Courtney, who is standing. He unbuttons her blouse and puts his hands on her breasts. Courtney lets him, she doesn't move or say anything. She tries not to cry. He then stands behind her and puts his hand down

her skirt and fondles her breast with his other hand. He smells her hair. He continues this as he speaks. Courtney holds still and tries not to cry.)

Bill

She used to sew her own clothes. She made clothes that fit her body so perfectly, that clung and draped as best you've ever seen. She was everything. It was too hard on her that she had to take care of Owen. It was too difficult. It was too hard on her that she had to take care of herself, 'cause Wayne wasn't taking care of her right. It was all too much.

(Bill holds her tight around her waist with one arm and tight around her neck with the other. Too tight. He is pressed against Courtney and she can barely breathe under his grip. Bill closes his eyes.)

Bill

Ask me to take you away from here, and I will, Jamie.

Courtney

I can't breathe.

Bill

Don't go back to him tonight, stay here.

(Courtney coughs a little.)

Bill

Stay here. We'll make a plan and we'll leave this town.

(Owen creeps down the stairs. He seems in anticipation of something terrible, breathing rapidly and on the brink of tears.)

Bill

I can't go back to carving on my arms. I can't go back to life without her, you hear me?

Owen
Uncle Bill?

Bill
Go back upstairs, Owen.

Owen
Did you hear that?

Bill
No, go back upstairs.

Owen
Uncle Bill, can we go check on Chester?

Bill
Tomorrow, Owen.

(Owen begins to cry in anxiety.)

Bill
Your mother and I are in the middle of something.

Owen
Can we check on Chester?

(The front door opens and Wayne enters. He is covered in blood down the front of his shirt and his pants. In one of his hands Wayne holds the disembodied head of a cow. Bill disengages from Courtney. Owen descends the stairs completely, Courtney goes to Owen and holds him)

Courtney
(disgusted and in horror) Oh, my God!

Owen
Chester?

Wayne
Take a good look.

Owen

Chester?

Wayne
Don't you recognize her?

Owen
Chester is a boy.

Wayne
Look.

Owen
He's hurt!

Wayne
That's your own fault!

Owen
Why!?

Wayne
Come here, now, we're gonna mount it, put it up with
the rest of them.

Owen
Why!? Why!?

Wayne
Now, let's put her up on the wall.

Owen
What did he ever do to you!?

Wayne
Owen, this is not a pet.

Owen
Chester is my friend.

Wayne
It is not your friend! It is not your friend! It's an
animal!

Owen
I'm an animal!

Wayne

You are not an animal.

(Wayne throws the head of Chester towards Owen and it lands at Owen's feet.)

Wayne

That is an animal.

Owen

(consoling Chester) It's okay Chester, it will be okay.

Wayne

You know what to do, now get started!

(Owen kneels down by the head, crying. He wants to embrace it as he used to when Chester was alive, but he doesn't know how. He whimpers.)

Wayne

(to Owen) Stop crying. *(to Courtney)* Jamie, go on upstairs, honey.

(Courtney is speechless and paralyzed with fear.)

Wayne

(to Owen) Stop fondling it and get to work. *(to Courtney)* I said, get your ass upstairs, do you hear me?!

Bill

(to Courtney) Stay put. *(to Wayne)* I shoulda never given her to you. She thought that's what she wanted. She thought you were something but you failed her. Your turn is up.

Wayne

(to Bill) You stupid son of a bitch. I helped her get away from you. *(to Courtney)* Tell him, Jamie. You disgust her. The way you tried to touch her, you're trash. She couldn't get far enough away from you. You're a stupid sick son of a bitch. You wanna watch me fuck her, would that cure you?

(Bill, enraged, charges at Wayne and knocks him to the floor. They punch each other, tumbling.)

Courtney

Stop it! STOP IT ARE YOU-

(Courtney's eyes dart around wildly searching for a way to stop this. She glances at the men wrestling. She looks at the shotgun. She considers the shotgun. Slowly, hesitantly, she takes the shotgun from the rack. Her hands are shaking. She cocks the hammer back and glances into the gun. There are bullets. She clicks the hammer in place. She looks at Owen.)

Courtney

STOP IT! STOP THIS RIGHT NOW! I'LL SHOOT!

(The Men do not stop or pay attention. She aims the shotgun across the room and fires it into the wall. Wayne and Bill stop wrestling. She has their attention. She points the shotgun at them.)

Courtney

Over here, both of you.

(Courtney points the gun at a particular spot in the floor in front of her. The men get up and approach the spot.)

Wayne

Careful with -

Courtney

SHUT UP! (pause) Now. (pause) Get on the ground.

Wayne

Careful, girl-

Courtney

FACE DOWN!

Bill

(as he's lying down) Jamie, you -

Courtney

COURTNEY! COURTNEY!

(The men lie face down. Courtney keeps the shotgun trained on them and remains behind them. Her hands are shaking. The men cannot see Courtney.)

Courtney

FUCK! I JUST! WANTED! YOUR SIGNATURE! I DON'T GIVE A FUCK ABOUT YOUR FUCKED UP WORLD YOU FUCKING FUCKHEADS! UGHHH! You're too familiar with me! *(to Bill)* I am not your sister! ECHE! *(to Wayne)* I am not your wife! I'm Courtney! I'm a legal secretary! I have a little house! I have a CAT! I should be there now! *(to Bill)* But you- Don't you fucking touch me! What the FUCK?!! *(to Wayne)* And YOU! You'll sign that goddamn piece of paper if I have to hold this gun to your fucking senseless fucking head!

(Courtney backs away. She lowers the gun, and seems exhausted. She goes to the table and gets the last document to be signed and the pen. She keeps the shotgun trained on the men while she does so. She hands the pen and paper to Wayne.)

Courtney

Sign it!

(Wayne signs it without a word. Courtney takes the document and pen back and puts them in her skirt pocket.)

Wayne

You've got what you want, now leave my family.

Courtney

I got what I want? I GOT WHAT I WANT?! I WAS ROBBED!
(waits for their response) I was robbed! (lifts the
shotgun back up with effort) I despise you. Both of
you. How dare you go on breathing. (to Bill) You know
what I think of you? I think you're trailer trash.
You're not fit for people. You're an animal. Only a
dumb-as-fuck animal would go around trying to fuck
with it's own sister. You're sick.

(Courtney clunks the nozzle of the
shotgun hard against the back of
Wayne's head.

Courtney

(to Wayne) And you!

(His head knocks forward, but he
remains kneeling upright.)

Courtney

You're a killer. (beat) I didn't come here for this.
This, THIS is not why I came here! Why is everyone
killing so easily? So senselessly? Even themselves?!
It's not about ending suffering, is it? (she looks at
the two men waiting for an answer) IS IT? (she looks
at the animal heads on the walls) What are you staring
at?! I couldn't save you! This is not my world!
(begins to cry) I want to sit in the grove. I want to
be wrapped in beauty, until my body turns to dust. I
want to find a way to hold myself together and feel
fine. (to Owen) I was so in love. He had to have known
that. I was so deeply in love. I was consumed in it.
I could've floated endlessly. I didn't know how
dangerous it was. I was in love. And I was robbed. I
came here to find him. I came here to be with him, and
I found him. I found you. He wouldn't have killed
himself if this wasn't happening to you. He wouldn't
have killed himself if they weren't doing this to you.
(to the men) How dare you go on breathing? How dare
you go on living? How dare you? I despise you for
living.

(She returns to standing behind
them.)

Courtney

(to the men) Get on your knees.

(The men slowly rise to their knees. They face out, still unable to see Courtney. They are very nervous, very fearful of what this means. Courtney looks at Owen.)

Courtney

It's just me and the sky out here. Me and the sky. Just me and the sky. I could float endlessly. If I find a balance between what I can remember and what I can forget.

(Courtney begins to cry as she lifts the shotgun to the back of Wayne's head. Her hands are shaking badly.)

Courtney

The sky. And what I can forget.

Wayne

Please don't do this.

Courtney

Shhhhhh...

Courtney & Owen

Shhhhhh... *(continues through Wayne's pleas)*

Wayne

Please leave me to my misery.

Courtney

Shhhhhh...

Wayne

It's more punishing to be miserable than to die.

Courtney

Shhhh... *(continues until the shot)*

Owen

Bye Daddy.

(Courtney braces herself and pulls the trigger. Wayne falls over)

dead. Bill is horrified at Wayne's body.)

Bill

I know, I know how you feel. I know how you feel. I get lost in it too. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I get lost in it.

Courtney & Owen

Shhhhhh... (continuous)

Bill

Please don't do this! Owen! Owen don't let her do this!

Courtney & Owen

Shhhhhh... (continuous)

Bill

I care about life, I care about the mural.

Courtney

(calm) The mural is mine.

Bill

Please.

Courtney

(places the shotgun to the back of Bill's head) I'm sorry. There's just nowhere else for you to go.

(Courtney pulls the trigger. Bill falls over dead. Courtney remains standing behind the dead bodies. She stares at them. It is very quiet. She looks deadened. Emotionless. Courtney lowers the shotgun down. Owen joins her, stands next to her, wraps his arm around her waist in a hug. She drapes one arm around him. She seems to stare into space, disassociating. A long moment lapses. The lights fade down to black.)

END OF PLAY.

Childhood Montana
By Mira Gibson