

in a word

a new play

by Lauren Yee

Contact agent:

Antje Oegel
AO International
5240 N. Sheridan Road, #814
Chicago, IL 60640
(773) 754-7628
aoegel@aioagency.com

Contact playwright:

Lauren Yee
550 29th Avenue
San Francisco, CA 94121
(415) 794-1080
lauren.d.yee@gmail.com

CAST OF CHARACTERS (1W, 2M)

1. FIONA, female, 30s, gutsy/shell-shocked
2. GUY, male, 30s, Fiona's husband, pragmatic to a fault (also plays the PHOTOGRAPHER)
3. MAN, male, multiple people:
 - MAN, the kidnapper, a guy you'd otherwise hang out with
 - DETECTIVE, missing persons detective, eager, not too bright
 - TRISTAN, seven, smart, different, probably has Asperger's
 - ANDY, Guy's friend, a real nice fucker
 - PRINCIPAL, Ted, Fiona's boss, apologetic
 - OFFICER, police officer on the day of the kidnapping

ABOUT THE PLAY

In this play, objects have a life of their own. Objects come up again whether you want them to or not. Words also come up again, and sometimes the characters realize this or not. Time is very fluid.

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Scene 1

Living room

(FIONA is on the floor, sifting through children's sweaters and other papers. She is dressed in her home clothes. She eats a candy bar. GUY returns home from work with a newspaper)

GUY

You ready?

FIONA

Mmh.

GUY

You're not ready.

(FIONA shrugs)

GUY

Thought you wanted to go to dinner.

FIONA

I do.

GUY

Thought you wanted to go now.

FIONA

In a minute.

GUY

Good day today?

FIONA

Eh.

GUY

You been busy?

FIONA

Same old.

(Beat)

GUY

I saw the article.

FIONA

Yeah?

GUY

In the newspaper.

FIONA

Good.

GUY

Local section, front page.

FIONA

I know.

GUY

I thought we agreed we weren't talking about this anymore.

FIONA

They called.

They wanted to know how we're doing, two years later.

They wanted a picture and a word, what could I say?

GUY

"No?" That's a word. Say that.

FIONA

(shrugs) They wanted a word—

GUY

So you gave them a hundred?

FIONA

If it's for the case—

(shrug) It was for the case.

GUY

I thought you said you didn't like talking about it.

Thought you never wanted to talk about it again.

FIONA

I didn't. I don't.

But if it's for the newspaper.

GUY

'Cause you know:

Andy once had a girlfriend. Who had a kid.

She stopped talking to the media. And it helped.

FIONA

I know, but you get something in the newspaper,
Someone sees something:
You get all sorts of leads.
You get something in the newspaper
And people'll come up to you in the grocery store and say-

(From out of nowhere, a MAN approaches FIONA)

MAN

Hey.

FIONA

Hey.

(Flashback to earlier in the day. At the grocery store.)

FIONA and the MAN stand side by side in the fruit aisle, examining melons. The MAN holds Fiona's bag of groceries.

GUY remains in the background, listening to the story)

MAN

I know you.

FIONA

Excuse me?

MAN

In the paper. This morning?

FIONA

Oh. Right. Yeah.

(The MAN stares at FIONA, smiles)

MAN

You don't remember me, do you?

FIONA

I'm sorry, should I?

GUY

Did you?

MAN
Think I had your kid.

FIONA
In class?

MAN
In captivity.

FIONA
(amused but disbelieving) Noooo.

MAN
I'm pretty sure.

FIONA
You got a picture?

(The MAN opens his wallet, shows FIONA a picture)

FIONA
Omigod, that's Tristan!

GUY
And what did he have to say for himself?

FIONA
Honestly, I didn't think to bring it up.

GUY
I think you imagined it.

FIONA
Guy.

GUY
I'm just saying—
You put something in the newspaper and all kinds of people are
going to come out of the woodwork.
And c'mon: you met him buying watermelon?

FIONA
Cantaloupe!

GUY
And you're not the least bit suspicious.

FIONA

He came up to me.

GUY

Exactly.

FIONA

You don't believe me.

GUY

I'm just saying—
There's this guy and there was that last guy.

FIONA

Which guy?

MAN

At the bookstore.
At the coffee shop.
At the zoo.

FIONA

(shrugs) So I see a lot of them.

GUY

They can't all be your guy.

FIONA

No?

GUY

'Cause you know you only get one.

FIONA

Wait.

MAN

I should get going. My meter's gonna expire—

FIONA

What're you up to tomorrow?

MAN

Listen, lady: I said hi, it's been nice, but really I gotta go.

FIONA

How'd you do it?

MAN

Lady, seriously—

(FIONA grabs the Man's bag in an effort to stall him)

FIONA

Where is he?

(The MAN lets go of the bag. FIONA is left holding it)

MAN

He was right under your nose.
Have a good day.

(The MAN disappears. FIONA immediately puts the grocery bag aside.

Back to the present and the living room)

GUY

So he gave you a cantaloupe?

FIONA

Which he touched. Which I then brought to the detective.

GUY

Why?

FIONA

Why not?

GUY

Because you think he's an idiot.
Because you think he's worse than the guy we had before.

FIONA

Worse is better than nothing.

GUY

And what did you say, huh? "I met a guy and another guy and among the six of them I may have your guy?"

FIONA

I did. I do.

(Flashback to earlier in the day.

The DETECTIVE at his desk, showing FIONA pictures of children.

GUY once again sits in the background, listening)

DETECTIVE

How 'bout this one?

FIONA

No.

DETECTIVE

You sure?

FIONA

Yep.

DETECTIVE

And this?

FIONA

No. (beat) I'm sorry, Detective, but look: I came in about a lead.

(FIONA shows the DETECTIVE the bag from the previous scene)

DETECTIVE

(re: grocery bag) A bag?

FIONA

A man.

(The DETECTIVE reaches into the bag, takes out a cantaloupe)

DETECTIVE

(confused) And a cantaloupe.

FIONA

We were in the produce aisle.

DETECTIVE

(re: cantaloupe) And how is this a lead?

FIONA

Well, there was a man, in the grocery store, and I think he's the one.

(FIONA hands off the cantaloupe to the DETECTIVE, who cuts up the cantaloupe for eating. He takes a bite, contemplates the cantaloupe)

DETECTIVE
So: what'd he look like?

FIONA
Six foot.*

DETECTIVE
Yep.

FIONA
Green eyes.

DETECTIVE
Sure.

FIONA
Red hair.

DETECTIVE
So: me.

FIONA
Right. No.

DETECTIVE
You get a name?

FIONA
No.

DETECTIVE
A license plate, a blood type—?

FIONA
(sheepish) His meter was gonna expire.

DETECTIVE
You get anything?

FIONA
(sheepish again) I got a cantaloupe.

DETECTIVE
Not much of a lead.

FIONA

* The following description of the MAN should be altered to reflect the actual appearance of the actor playing the MAN, with the most distinctive feature last.

Sorry.

DETECTIVE

(re: cantaloupe) Though it *is* delicious!

(The DETECTIVE offers a slice of cantaloupe to FIONA)

DETECTIVE

(re: cantaloupe) Can't escape?

FIONA

(disturbed) What?

(The DETECTIVE still holds up the slice of cantaloupe)

DETECTIVE

Cantaloupe. Have a piece.

FIONA

Oh. No. I shouldn't.

DETECTIVE

Just take a bite out of crime.

FIONA

I brought it for you. For evidence.

DETECTIVE

Eh, more than enough guilt to go around.
You sure? All right...

(The DETECTIVE finishes cantaloupe by himself. He then searches for a box)

DETECTIVE

Not to worry, though. May not have answers, but we always have leads.

(The DETECTIVE plunks the box in front of FIONA. Several leaves float out of the box)

GUY

Leaves?

DETECTIVE

Leaves!
So your son, seven years old, right?

FIONA

Right.

DETECTIVE

Second grade?

FIONA

Yes. He was in my class. I teach- (corrects) *Taught-*

DETECTIVE

And kid's shirt size small, right?

FIONA

Right.

DETECTIVE

Now tell me: is he a sweater?

FIONA

What?

(The DETECTIVE reaches into the boxes of leaves and pulls out a sweater.

All of the sweaters are wrong for a seven-year-old boy. Some of them are too big, too garish. Some are girl sweaters)

DETECTIVE

Is he this sweater?

FIONA

No.

DETECTIVE

How 'bout this one?

FIONA

He's not a sweater-

DETECTIVE

-that you know of.

Two years, he might've faded, shrunk.

We're not looking for a perfect fit here-

FIONA

These are girl sweaters.

These are ugly sweaters.

DETECTIVE

Look: I know this is difficult—

FIONA

I'm not asking you for answers right now but—

DETECTIVE

We may not have answers, but we always have sleeves!

GUY

Leads?

FIONA

Sleeves. Literally. Literally sleeves!

GUY

How are sleeves leads?

FIONA

I know!

DETECTIVE

Always worth a second look.

(The DETECTIVE demonstrates, feels the sweaters)

GUY

At least he's being thorough.

DETECTIVE

"Leave no rock unturned!" That's what I always say.
 One time, lady lost her son. Fifteen years. They found him as a
 rock, right in her own backyard. Cold, hard, igneous. But it was
 him. Right under her nose.
 (question, concerned) You've checked under your nose recently.

FIONA

Yes!

DETECTIVE

Okay, okay.

FIONA

Give me something else. Give me something real. I bring you
 evidence—

DETECTIVE

Technically, you're bringing me cantaloupe.

FIONA

-and all you show me are rocks and leaves and, and sweaters.
You are getting me nowhere fast.

DETECTIVE

But at least you're going somewhere, right?

FIONA

You are wasting my time.

DETECTIVE

(beat) You're right. I am.

FIONA

No.

DETECTIVE

You can go.

FIONA

No, it's just, I've been out on a limb lately, I have this tree at home-

DETECTIVE

Listen, lady: I know this's tough, and maybe you don't think your son's a sweater or a rock or anything like that, but whatever he once was, he isn't anymore.
People come in here, looking for a missing person and sometimes it isn't gonna be a person.
Sometimes it's just gonna be a sweater.

FIONA

It's fine. I'll take it.

(FIONA takes a box. The DETECTIVE exits. The flashback ends)

FIONA

(to GUY) Always worth a second look, right?
I hear it takes time.
He says it takes time.

DETECTIVE

(offstage) And sweaters!

(GUY sweeps the few stray leaves aside)

FIONA

He said he's gonna come by later if he can dig anything up.

GUY

Yeah, well, maybe you should put some of this stuff away first.

FIONA

Why?

(Maybe GUY picks a small twig off a sweater. Weird)

GUY

This place is a mess.

FIONA

Guy, this place is always a mess, whether it's me or not.

GUY

Fiona—

FIONA

No, seriously: you need to get that lock fixed. Sometimes I come home and the door isn't even all the way shut.

GUY

It's probably just us.

FIONA

I mean it!

GUY

No one is following you around.

FIONA

Oh really?

GUY

No one is in the corner of your eye or the back of your mind or anything else like that.

FIONA

You don't know.

GUY

I do 'cause he's not.
There is no one here but you and me and all this stuff.
You know, Andy once had a girlfriend. Who had a kid.
She cleaned house. And it helped.

FIONA

I don't want to do what the girlfriend Andy once had once did.
I don't want to do what anyone Andy once did did.

GUY

Fiona-

FIONA

Sometimes, I don't know-
Sometimes, I come in and it's like we've been robbed,
Like someone comes in when we're not here-

(The MAN enters with a cardboard box and begins to steal various objects from the room. All kinds of stuff, but mainly things that could have been Tristan's. FIONA and GUY are unaware of him)

GUY

-and rearranges the furniture?

(Thus inspired, the MAN also rearranges the furniture for the next scene)

FIONA

I used to step on his toys all the time.
I used to find them at night, walking through the house.
I used to tell him:
"You don't put them away, I'm gonna throw them out.

FIONA/MAN

Take care of your things, or you're gonna lose them."

FIONA

And now?

(FIONA shrugs/gestures "poof!")

The MAN finishes his work. A wind blows him out of the scene)

GUY

I wouldn't worry about it. I'm sure it's just us.

(FIONA looks for something that was just there. It's been moved/taken.

GUY examines the newspaper again)

GUY

Why'd you give them this picture?

FIONA

It's the picture we always use.

GUY

It's five years old.

FIONA

It's a good picture.

GUY

Yeah, but what about the pictures from Picture Day?

FIONA

Guy. Ew. No.

GUY

"Most recent picture?"

That's what they said, right?

Picture Day: you can't get more recent than that.

FIONA

Oh come on.

GUY

Why not?

FIONA

Picture Day?

People don't want to see that.

GUY

No?

FIONA

No! "Day he disappeared," how does that sound?

It sounds morbid, that's how it sounds.

People don't want to remember that.

People don't want to see—

(Camera flash, TRISTAN's Picture Day photo)

GUY

What?

(We segue into the past: Picture Day)

Scene 2

Picture Day

Day of the kidnapping

(TRISTAN squirms a bit, as FIONA adjusts his clothes)

Picture Day!

FIONA

Yep.

TRISTAN

Tristan, are you ready?

FIONA

(TRISTAN groans a little)

I said, Tris, you ready?

FIONA

Yep.

TRISTAN

You sure?

FIONA

Yep.

TRISTAN

Okay.
Which one?

FIONA

(FIONA looks into her box, offers various sweaters)

Black and tan?
Red and white with stripes all over?

FIONA

(TRISTAN pulls out one sweater...)

Brown and sticky.

TRISTAN

What?

FIONA

TRISTAN

(chooses) Green and blue.

FIONA

All right then.
Very nice.
Comb your hair
Fix your shirt
Tuck it in
Now give me a kiss
Give me a kiss.

(FIONA gets a kiss from TRISTAN)

FIONA

You look very nice. Now try to keep it that way.
Okay?
C'mon.

(FIONA tickles TRISTAN, he squirms and squeals. She tickles him more, he squirms more. She smiles and kisses him on the forehead)

FIONA

Now c'mon.

(Fastforward to FIONA and TRISTAN in the auditorium.

The PHOTOGRAPHER, played by GUY, pops his head in)

PHOTOGRAPHER

Mrs. Hamlin?

FIONA

Hold on.
(to TRISTAN) Your pants are falling.
Pick up your pants, Tris, they're gonna fall down.

(TRISTAN picks up his pants, sits down in the chair)

PHOTOGRAPHER

Eyes nice and wide now.

(The PHOTOGRAPHER takes out a comb, combs Tristan's hair. TRISTAN fusses a tiny bit)

FIONA

I'm sorry.

PHOTOGRAPHER

Don't sweat it. Eyes nice and wide and-

(TRISTAN holds his pose. Camera flash.

We see the photograph of Tristan: typical Lifetouch stuff: neat, perfect, adorable, on an abstract colored background. FIONA beams. Camera flash.

Back to the present)

GUY

See what?
People don't want to see what?

FIONA

That. It's just-

(GUY begins to look around the room)

FIONA

What're you doing?

GUY

Where'd you put 'em?

FIONA

Put what?

GUY

Picture Day. We should find 'em.
If you're gonna put his picture in the newspaper, we might as well have the right one, don't you think?

FIONA

I don't even know where I put them.
I don't even know if we have those anymore.

GUY

I bet they're upstairs.

(FIONA instinctively gathers up her things: the box of sweaters/leaves)

FIONA

You're gonna make a mess.

GUY

This place is always a mess, right?

(GUY gets up)

FIONA

Guy-

GUY

If someone's gonna see something,
They should see something correct, right?

(GUY exits)

Scene 3

Living room

(GUY holds up the newspaper)

GUY

(to us) Fiona has a story and usually it contains the words:

(A set of words, perhaps ripped from the headlines, conveniently falls out of the newspaper and into Fiona's lap.)

She takes out the set of words, reads them, as she has read them dozens of times before, in various orders.

Perhaps we see the words, perhaps TRISTAN helps hold them up)

FIONA

Love
Loved
My baby
Tristan
He was a
Is a

GUY

Twenty-four months of the same words, countless permutations, rotating through her vocabulary, but always the same—

FIONA

Good kid
Who we
Miss
Every
Day after day

GUY

And the funny thing is:
They're none of the words I remember her saying while he was here.

FIONA

Blink and you—
Miss him

GUY

Not a one!

FIONA

All the time
He was—

(GUY adds a word of his own)

GUY

Difficult.

(FIONA looks up at GUY, notices him for the first time)

FIONA

What?

GUY

Difficult.
He was all those things, but he was difficult, too.

FIONA

(faux playful) This is my story, Guy. I'm talking. Get your own story and stop butting into mine, okay?

GUY

He was.

FIONA

(dismissive) Okay.

GUY

He was.

FIONA

Maybe. I don't remember.

(GUY conjures up a memory of TRISTAN in the midst of a tantrum. He gets into a pile of leaves, spreads leaves everywhere.)

FIONA sees TRISTAN but does not hear him or even acknowledge there is anything wrong)

GUY

Doesn't sound familiar?

FIONA

I don't hear anything.

GUY

You sure?

FIONA

(shrugs, looks off in the distance) Is that a tree?

GUY

No.

FIONA

Oh. Then I don't know what you're talking about.

(TRISTAN enters and produces a bag of dirty laundry. He takes a piece out for every secret, passes it off to GUY.

An unseen audience of second graders egg him on)

TRISTAN

She snores.
She smells.
She farts in her sleep.
She sleeps on the couch.
And she hits me.
On the lips.

GUY

None of this?

FIONA

Nope.

(FIONA exits. GUY holds all the laundry, then stuffs it back into the bag.

Flashback to GUY and TRISTAN sharing a moment. GUY drinks an espresso)

GUY

Tris.

TRISTAN

Yeah?

GUY

You can't be doing that.

TRISTAN

Why not?

GUY

How would you like it if she brought your dirty laundry to class?

(TRISTAN shrugs)

GUY

She's your mother, but she's your teacher, too, and she's been under a lot of pressure lately.

TRISTAN

'Cause of me?

GUY

'Cause of herself.
She's only cranky 'cause she's tired.
She's only angry 'cause she's disappointed in herself.
She's just been having a rough time.

TRISTAN

What're you having?

GUY

I'm having an espresso.

TRISTAN

I want some.

GUY

It's only for grown-ups.

TRISTAN

I'm a grown-up.

GUY

You're seven. It's only for grown-ups who're having second thoughts.

TRISTAN

I'm a second thought.

GUY

Who're having a mid-life crisis.

TRISTAN

I'm a mid-life crisis.

GUY

No, you're not.

TRISTAN

I am! I'M A FUCKING MID-LIFE CRISIS! AAAAAAAAH.

GUY

(amused) When you're older, you will be.

(TRISTAN waits, then...)

TRISTAN

I'm older.

GUY

I know.

TRISTAN

And older.

And older.

I'm older than I've ever been,
Than I'll ever be.

GUY

What?

TRISTAN

Pleeeeeease?

(GUY hands TRISTAN his espresso)

GUY

All right.

But we don't tell Mom.

TRISTAN

Because I'm a rough time.

GUY

Yes.

(GUY does a special move with TRISTAN that stands in
for hugging)

GUY

Now go brush up.

(TRISTAN drinks the espresso as they walk back to
the house)

GUY

(to us) Because when Tristan was around, those were the kind of words I heard. I'd come home and it wasn't-

(FIONA appears. Lovingly...)

Love
FIONA

Or-
GUY

Loved
FIONA

Or even-
GUY

My baby!
FIONA

It was-
GUY

(FIONA confronts GUY in the living room)

FIONA
What in holy flipping hell did you give him?

GUY
Nothing.

FIONA
You did. You gave him a mid-life crisis.

(TRISTAN crosses the room, still drinking the espresso. To no one in particular...)

TRISTAN
I've wasted my life! I've gotten myself into something that I can never get out of!

GUY
I gave him a sip.

TRISTAN
(offstage) I'm having second thoughts!

FIONA
That's more than a sip.

(TRISTAN crosses the room again)

TRISTAN

I don't wanna live this shit life anymore! I'm such a fucking retard!

GUY

People say retard.

FIONA

Not in this house.

GUY

People say it all the time. And he wanted to know.

FIONA

I want to know string theory. I want to know the guitar. I want to know where you go at night. Doesn't mean I should.

GUY

Fiona, you need to stop being so, so-

(TRISTAN appears, holding a word)

TRISTAN

"Anal?"

GUY

Yes. No.

(TRISTAN digs into his pocket, tries another)

TRISTAN

"Oral?"

(GUY motions to TRISTAN. The universal kill gesture)

TRISTAN

"Vaginal?" What. Daddy: what?

FIONA

Where did he get those?

(GUY shrugs)

FIONA

Tris, show me what's in your pockets.

(TRISTAN keeps his hands in his pockets)

TRISTAN

What fucking asshat pockets?

(FIONA pulls Tristan's hands out of his pockets)

GUY

Fiona—

TRISTAN

They're mine! I learned 'em! You can't!

FIONA

Yes, I can.

(TRISTAN struggles in Fiona's grasp)

TRISTAN

Daddy's friend gave 'em to me!

FIONA

Did he now?

(GUY checks his cell phone)

GUY

I'm gonna take this call.

(GUY exits)

GUY

Hey man, yeah—

TRISTAN

His phone didn't ring.

FIONA

Tristan.

(TRISTAN hands over some of the words)

FIONA

All of them.

TRISTAN

Can't I have just one?

FIONA

These're for grown-ups.

TRISTAN

Why?

FIONA

'Cause grown-ups need them.

TRISTAN

Why?

FIONA

To cope.

TRISTAN

I cope.

FIONA

No, you don't.

TRISTAN

I do!

FIONA

Well, you shouldn't have to.
You use grown-up words, you have to know what they mean. Otherwise,
you'll use them wrong and people will misunderstand you.

TRISTAN

Do people misunderstand you?

FIONA

All the time. Now get in bed.

TRISTAN

(relents) All right.

(TRISTAN turns to exit, then stops)

TRISTAN

I don't really think you stink. Not like a lot.

FIONA

Okay.

(TRISTAN exits. GUY paces into the room, still on
the phone)

GUY

-yeah, no, no, shit move, totally.

(FIONA thrusts the jar in front of GUY)

FIONA

You, too.

GUY

(not belligerent) I'm on the fucking phone.

FIONA

Guy.

GUY

(to phone) Hold on a sec.

(GUY opens his wallet, hands FIONA words. He digs into various pockets: breast pockets, back pockets, jacket pockets. More words. He takes off his shoe, words pour out.)

GUY has a fucking huge vocabulary. A shitload)

FIONA

We need to talk.

GUY

I'm all outta words.

FIONA

Now.

GUY

(to phone) Call you back. Yeah. She's being a-

(FIONA holds up a word: "bitch")

FIONA

"Bitch?"

GUY

(to phone) I know, I know, it's retarded. A'right, see you.

(GUY hangs up)

FIONA

He's picking up your bad habits.
And my dirty laundry.

GUY

What do you want me to say? You leave them around, somebody's gonna pick them up and it's not gonna be me.

FIONA

Tristan, he looks up to you.

GUY

He's four feet tall: he looks up to everything.

FIONA

Guy—!

(FIONA gestures, GUY takes the last few, most hidden words out, deposits it into the jar)

GUY

What can I say? Andy's got a foul mouth and kids love him. You can't shield him.

FIONA

In this house, I can. There. See?

(FIONA screws a lid on the jar very tightly)

FIONA

For when he's older.

GUY

So what're we supposed to say instead?

(FIONA hands him a set of words)

FIONA

Here.

(GUY flips through them)

GUY

This is fucking— (as FIONA gives him the eye) —*fudging* ridiculous.

FIONA

Like fudge it is.

GUY

This is hecka mentally challenged.

FIONA

Your friend is hecka mentally challenged.

GUY

Just because we don't say these things out loud doesn't make them not true. You can put it another way, but you can't put it away.

FIONA

We'll see about that.

(FIONA exits with her word jar. GUY holds up the newspaper demonstratively)

GUY

Fiona has a story.
And it usually doesn't contain me at all.
And the funny thing is—

(We zoom out to see that GUY has been talking to his friend ANDY throughout this scene.)

ANDY hands GUY a beer. GUY hands ANDY the newspaper.
They are not at home)

ANDY

Yeah?

GUY

I don't know.
I just don't know, Andy.

ANDY

Know what?

GUY

I don't know.
I just don't know what I don't know.

ANDY

And you can't expect to.

(ANDY gestures to the newspaper, shakes his head)

ANDY

Shit: you've been through a fucking rough fucking time.
Your kid's gone, been two years: rough fucking fucking time.

GUY

To her, I'm just something to fall back on.

ANDY

So you're a mattress.
She thinks you're her fucking fucking mattress.

GUY

Yeah!

ANDY

A big softie.

GUY

I know!

ANDY

Something to catch a few winks with.

GUY

Not even!

ANDY

I had a girl and a futon like that.
It's nice for a while, but no way to fucking fuck.

GUY

Right?!

ANDY

'Cause: you?
You're a guy.

GUY

Yeah—

ANDY

You're a guy's guy!

GUY

I am!

ANDY

You're your own man!

GUY

That's right, huh?!

ANDY

And asking her to
Get out
Get up
Get off

Once in a while?
That's not too much to ask for, is it?

GUY

Is it?

ANDY

Is it!

GUY

It isn't!

ANDY

No!

GUY

Yeah—! Or no!

ANDY

Not for a guy's guy's girl.

GUY

Yeah!

ANDY

She still on that tree of absence?

GUY

Yep. And it's a real weeping willow.

ANDY

That bad, huh?

GUY

Yep.

ANDY

Ah, jeez.
How long's that shit been?

(GUY gestures: "this long")

ANDY

That tall, huh?

GUY

Yep.

ANDY

What she needs:
She needs to get herself off.

GUY

How?

ANDY

You get off by letting yourself off.
You get down by going through.
If you know what I mean.

GUY

I think I know what you mean.

(ANDY gives GUY a look)

GUY

No, but I know what you mean!

ANDY

You know what I'm saying!

GUY

I do!

ANDY

You don't cut that shit down:
You're gonna wake up to a fucking tree of abstinence.

GUY

Already have.

ANDY

Oohf: that's rough.
'Cause you may not have answers, but you always got needs.

GUY

Tell me about it.

ANDY

I once had a girlfriend. Who had a kid.
She couldn't get off hers. And-

GUY

What?

ANDY

Oh. Well. She shot herself.

(Following is in constant rewind...)

GUY
 She what?

ANDY
 She joined the army.

GUY
 She what?

ANDY
 She got her JD.

GUY
 She what?

ANDY
 She flew the coop.
 She popped the weasel.
 She got in a jam and a pickle.
 She put the bomp in the bompbahbompbah.
 She put the rama in the ramalamadingdong.
 She kicked the bucket and then the tires.
 She did everything.
 (fondly) Boy, oh boy, did she do everything.
 But I'll tell you, [the] one thing she never did?

GUY
 Yeah?

ANDY
 Never got over—

GUY
 What you can't go over, you go through!

ANDY
 —'cause after a thing like that, you can do anything.
 But you can never get over.

(GUY stares off. ANDY slaps GUY on the leg,
 confidentially, to change the mood)

ANDY
 You know:
 I once had an idea. Of a person.
 Who I wanted to be when I grew up. And—

GUY

And?

ANDY

Think he became you, I don't remember. Nice guy, that Guy.
Think he became you. For a while. And then he wasn't himself
anymore.

I should dig him up.

He's been buried in shit for a while.

I should dig him up and give him a call.

Nice guy, that you.

But if you see him, tell him I want him back, okay?

Tell him I want to see him some time.

'Cause he's not the Guy you used to be.

GUY

That guy wasn't so good either.

ANDY

Well, he was something.

At least he was something.

GUY

We should get back.

(GUY moves to leave)

ANDY

She's only on it because you been letting her.

She's only living there because you live there with her.

And it's no place to be.

(GUY notices the shadow of the tree looming over
Andy's shoulder)

GUY

We should really get back.

ANDY

Where?

GUY

To where we were before.

ANDY

Which was—?

GUY

Home.

(GUY hands his drink to ANDY)

GUY

I should get back home.

(ANDY hands GUY the newspaper)

GUY

To the pictures.

To the present.

(FIONA appears as ANDY disappears)

FIONA

Which was—?

Scene 4

Living room

(Back to the present. Where we were at the top of the previous scene)

GUY

Difficult.

He was difficult, and there was nothing wrong with that.

You know that, right?

You gonna tell me where the pictures are?

Fiona?

Okay.

(GUY exits.)

FIONA is struck by a memory. TRISTAN enters with his green and blue sweater stuck over his head)

TRISTAN

(muffled) Help me.

(TRISTAN flaps his sleeves helplessly. It's charming)

TRISTAN

(muffled) Mom: help me.

FIONA

You want me to help?

(TRISTAN nods)

FIONA

And you won't scream?

(TRISTAN shakes his head)

FIONA

Okaaaay.

(FIONA helps TRISTAN get his sweater off. Then she throws her arms around him. Big hug. TRISTAN groans, slightly disgruntled)

FIONA

Can I hold you?

Can I just hold you?

I used to.

I used to and you liked it.
 What happened to that, huh?
 What happened to that?

(TRISTAN tries to wriggle from her grasp, but she holds tighter. She closes her eyes, she smells him.

TRISTAN wriggles out of her grasp. FIONA is left holding the sweater, unaware)

FIONA

(to us) That's what I remember.
 And if that's difficult, well, I didn't see it.

(Back to the present. GUY enters, bringing in a box of papers, folders, and school photographs. He searches through them)

GUY

You gonna help?

FIONA

They're not in there.
 And we're never getting to dinner at this rate.

GUY

I can wait.

FIONA

Okay.

GUY

We got a voicemail.
 The school called.

FIONA

I saw.
 See?
 You get in the paper and everyone comes out of the woodwork, I told you.

GUY

What did they say?

FIONA

I don't know. I didn't check.

GUY

I bet it's Ted.

So?

FIONA

I think you should call him.

GUY

I don't.

FIONA

I bet he wants to give you your job back.

GUY

I have a job.

FIONA

Looking is not a job.
Looking for someone is not something to spend all your time on.

GUY

Well, it's what I spend my time on.
Ted made it pretty clear when he fired me-

FIONA

It was a leave of absence. And if he's calling now-

GUY

It's been two years.

FIONA

Exactly.

GUY

No.

FIONA

It was one day.
It was one bad day.
Picture Day's always bad, right?
So just call him.
Just call him and say-

GUY

What? "Hey, Ted?"

FIONA

(The PRINCIPAL appears, at the start of a
conversation)

PRINCIPAL

Fiona.

(GUY signals: camera flash. We go back into the past)

Scene 5

Picture Day

(FIONA about to leave the school. She cleans off her hands.

Ted the PRINCIPAL corners her)

PRINCIPAL

A word?

FIONA

Which word?

PRINCIPAL

Tristan. It's about Tristan.

FIONA

(joke) Little more than a word there.

PRINCIPAL

So more than a word. Several words.

FIONA

Can this wait? I got Tristan in the car-

PRINCIPAL

And how's he doing?

FIONA

Why?

PRINCIPAL

Is he okay?

FIONA

Why wouldn't he be?

You know, Ted, really, can we talk tomorrow?

(FIONA edges towards the door)

PRINCIPAL

We're gonna go ahead and switch him back.

(FIONA stops)

FIONA

Ted, we agreed-

PRINCIPAL

You said three months: we've given you four. It was against policy to even let him be in your class. Joanne'll still take him, and maybe a special class, more one-on-one education'll solve the problem—

FIONA

Children like him don't need more attention.

PRINCIPAL

I know—

FIONA

Because if you want a retard, Joanne's the retard.

PRINCIPAL

Fiona—

FIONA

You move him, I'll transfer him.
You move him—

PRINCIPAL

I know.

FIONA

I'll quit. I will.

PRINCIPAL

I know.
Here.

FIONA

What?

(The PRINCIPAL hands the paper to FIONA)

FIONA

A letter?

PRINCIPAL

A leave.

FIONA

(question) A lead.

PRINCIPAL

(slowly) A leave. A leave of absence.

FIONA

(tries to understand) A leeeeeaddddd of absence.

PRINCIPAL

(together) A leeeeeeeeeeavvvvvve of absence.

FIONA

(together) A leeeeeeeeeeaffffff of absence.

(PRINCIPAL takes out the leave of absence, which is
actually a small tree of absence)

FIONA

A treeeeeeee of absence?

PRINCIPAL

Just for now.

Think of this as an opportunity.

Take some time, go out on a limb, turn over a new leaf.

Take some time, and you can come right back to where you leafed
off.

FIONA

Left off?

PRINCIPAL

Fiona, please.

FIONA

C'mon, Ted. It's always crazy on Picture Day, you know that.

PRINCIPAL

You've been distracted, we've had complaints—

FIONA

About what?

PRINCIPAL

I think you know.

(The PRINCIPAL produces Fiona's bag of dirty
laundry)

FIONA

Ted, I didn't—
We don't.

(The PRINCIPAL reaches into the bag. He pulls out Fiona's socks, shirts, underwear. It's incriminating evidence)

PRINCIPAL

You sure?

FIONA

Where did you get that?

PRINCIPAL

Facts're facts and socks're socks.

Me? I don't care what you do, but air your dirty laundry out at home, okay?

(FIONA grabs the dirty laundry from the PRINCIPAL)

FIONA

Fine, that's fine.

But Ted, seriously, can we talk about this?

PRINCIPAL

We have.

Tristan can go to Joanne and you can take a break-

FIONA

Ted, really, I don't need a break-

PRINCIPAL

Look: it's just a tree.

You don't have to make it into a big thing if you don't want-

FIONA

How long?

PRINCIPAL

Six months.

Foot and a half.

Take it home, give it some water

And maybe something good'll grow.

I'll leaf it right here.

This is nothing against you.

You're great with kids. Just not your kid. Okay?

(FIONA grabs the tree of absence and puts it on top of her growing pile of stuff)

FIONA

(abrupt) Happy Picture Day, Ted.

(FIONA exits with her tree of absence, her dirty laundry, and her letter/leave/leaf of paper)

Scene 6

In the car
 Shortly after

(FIONA gets into the car with her tree of absence,
 dirty laundry, etc.

TRISTAN is already in the car, fidgeting)

FIONA

Let's go home, Tris.

TRISTAN

(re: tree) What's that?

FIONA

It's a leave of absence.

TRISTAN

Looks like a tree.

FIONA

("fine") Yes. It's a tree. It's a tree of absence.

TRISTAN

I want a tree of absence.

FIONA

It's only for grown-ups.

TRISTAN

Why?

FIONA

Because it's a lovely parting gift.

TRISTAN

I want a lovely parting gift.

FIONA

You have to be leaving first, in order to part.

TRISTAN

Are you leaving?

FIONA

Yes, I'm leaving.

TRISTAN

For where?

FIONA

Home. We're leaving for home.

TRISTAN

'Cause I stink.

FIONA

Yes.

(TRISTAN fidgets)

FIONA

Now stop picking at it.

(TRISTAN tries to stay still)

FIONA

After break, we're going to move you back to Mrs. Hoffstadt's class, okay?

TRISTAN

Why?

FIONA

Because you need help.

Sometimes people need a little extra help, even if they don't say so, and that's okay.

And if you're mad about something, you need to say so. 'Cause I'm always gonna be your mother, so I'm always gonna need to know.

TRISTAN

Always?

FIONA

Yep.

TRISTAN

When I'm eight?

FIONA

Yep.

TRISTAN

When I'm nine?

FIONA

Even then.

But I'll be dead by then.

TRISTAN

What?

FIONA

When I'm ten?
When I'm eleven?

TRISTAN

Right.

FIONA

When I'm deep in the ground?
When I'm over at Grandma's?

TRISTAN

Even when you're out of sight and out of mind, you'll never be out of my hair.

FIONA

And that's a good thing?

TRISTAN

Sometimes.

FIONA

(FIONA offers her non-driving hand)

Hug?

FIONA

(FIONA and TRISTAN link fingers. The hug stand-in)

Now sit still.

FIONA

(AS FIONA drives, TRISTAN wriggles out of his sweater. First, TRISTAN disappears and then his sweater)

Scene 7

Living room

(Back to the present. GUY now holds a previously unopened school photograph envelope, which he has dug out from the bottom of the box)

And that's it?
GUY

Yes.
FIONA

Really?
GUY

There's nothing after that because he was gone after that.
FIONA

And?
GUY

And I don't want to talk about it, honestly.
FIONA

With me.
GUY
You don't want to talk about it with me.
The newspaper, the police, the mailman: sure,
But me?

In general.
FIONA
I don't want to talk about it in general, okay?

(GUY holds up the envelope. FIONA immediately recognizes it. GUY keeps it just out of reach)

You sure?
GUY

What are you doing?
FIONA

What do you think is in here, huh?
GUY
If you don't open it.

FIONA

Give it.

GUY
Do you remember what you said to me?

FIONA
What?

GUY
When you came home that day, do you remember what you said to me?

FIONA
No, honestly.

GUY
Nothing?

FIONA
If there's something other than nothing, I don't remember.

GUY
Really.

FIONA
If I said something, tell me what I said then.
Tell me.
What did I say that was so important?

GUY
Nothing.

FIONA
See?

GUY
You said nothing.
You came home and you said—

(Flashback to FIONA and GUY in the living room.

GUY sits on the couch, waiting. FIONA enters with her tree of absence and her dirty laundry, she takes a couple steps forward and opens her mouth. Nothing comes out. She sits down on the couch, though slightly too far apart from GUY.

A chasm builds between them. A moment, then...)

FIONA

What.

GUY

What.

FIONA

Nothing.

GUY

You sure?

FIONA

Tell you later

(Time begins to pass. The tree begins to grow, seemingly underneath them. Maybe the couch sprouts branches with leaves)

FIONA

And later
And later
And later-

(The seasons change. A wind blows the leaves off the branches. Maybe the MAN comes by and rakes the leaves)

GUY

So when?

FIONA

When I'm ready
When I'm older
When he's older than he'll ever be, ever been
When he's a second thought
When it's not a rough time for me.

GUY

So when?

FIONA

So never.
Is never okay?

(Back to the present)

GUY

You came home and you had words for everyone else but me.

You came home and you couldn't even make me part of your vocabulary.

You came home and you couldn't even tell me-

(FIONA enters from a long day of talking to other people. She tosses her empty word jar on the couch)

GUY

How was it?

Fiona?

Police say anything?

(FIONA sighs. GUY holds up the Picture Day envelope)

GUY

The school sent the pictures.

You want to open it?

(FIONA shrugs and perches herself somewhere)

GUY

You okay?

(FIONA gestures to her empty word jar)

GUY

Oh. Tomorrow?

(FIONA shrugs)

GUY

Okay. We'll talk tomorrow.

(Back to the present)

GUY

And tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow-

Can we make tomorrow today?

Just for today, can today be tomorrow?

FIONA

Why?

GUY

Because it's time.

Because there's no gift like the present.

Because I can't make it better if you don't tell me how.

Because I'm here for you.

I am right here with you.

FIONA

You are not.
You are not where I am.

GUY

How do you know?

FIONA

'Cause you aren't.
'Cause you got over and I'm still here.
And that is not the same place, okay?
I've gotten myself on this fucking tree of absence and I don't know
how to get off.

GUY

You get off by letting yourself off.
You get down by going through.

FIONA

Well, I don't know if I want to do that, honestly.

GUY

It's been two years: you don't get off, you're gonna fall off.
Just try, okay?
Can you try and tell me what happened?

FIONA

I did.

GUY

When?

FIONA

Then.

GUY

When?

FIONA

That day: I called you.
After Picture Day, I called you.
To come and pick up Tris.

(Flashback to a phone ringing. And ringing. And
then—)

FIONA

I called and you were—

FIONA

I called and you weren't there.
I had a kid and a tree and a letter and a leaf.
And no Guy.

(GUY returns to normal)

GUY

Well, I'm here now.
So tell me
In plain speech,
In grown-up words.
Say it like it is. Was.

(GUY produces the word jar. He opens it. FIONA
winces. It has not been opened in a long time)

FIONA

You know what happened.

GUY

From the newspaper.
From the police report.
From our neighbors.
How about I know I hear it from you?

FIONA

You know what happened.

GUY

Then tell me what I don't.

(GUY offers FIONA the word jar. She keeps it with
her throughout the next scene. Maybe she stuffs all
the objects she receives into the jar. Maybe she
receives various words throughout the next scene.

In any case, FIONA takes the word jar and comes down
from her perch)

FIONA

It was an ordinary day.

(The MAN appears)

MAN

Wrong.

FIONA

It was Picture Day.

MAN

Yes.

FIONA

And he wasn't feeling well.

MAN

Wrong.

FIONA

And he was a little restless.

MAN

Wrong.

FIONA

And he had "tantrum" written all over him.

(Satisfied, the MAN hands FIONA the newspaper: her story)

MAN

Go on.

Scene 8

Picture Day

(We see TRISTAN on Picture Day. "Tantrum" is indeed written all over him. Maybe "tantrum" on one arm and "retard" on the other. FIONA tries to wipe it off and get him ready for the camera. TRISTAN uncomfortable in his green and blue sweater)

FIONA

Tristan—

(TRISTAN fusses loudly)

FIONA

Comb your hair.

(TRISTAN fusses again)

FIONA

Fix your shirt.

TRISTAN

No!

FIONA

Tuck it in.

Tuck it in.

Now give me a kiss

Give me a kiss.

(FIONA extracts a kiss from TRISTAN)

FIONA

You look very nice. Now try to keep it that way. Okay?

TRISTAN

No!

FIONA

C'mon.

TRISTAN

I don't wanna!

I don't wanna!

FIONA

(to offstage) Kayla Marie, get down from there and—

TRISTAN

(suddenly) He doesn't love you. Not even a little.

FIONA

That's not a very nice thing to say, Tris.

TRISTAN

He's gonna leave you.

FIONA

What?

(TRISTAN returns to what he was before)

TRISTAN

I don't wanna!

(FIONA grabs TRISTAN by the arm, he goes limp and writhes on the floor. She grabs his arm harder, he writhes more. He flings an arm at her face, she holds his arm)

FIONA

Now c'mon.

(He thrashes her in the face, she holds him still. The PHOTOGRAPHER pokes his head in)

PHOTOGRAPHER

Mrs. Hamlin?

FIONA

Hold on.

PHOTOGRAPHER

He doesn't have to.

FIONA

He will. A minute, okay?
 Your pants are falling.
 Your pants are falling.
 Pick up your pants, Tris, they're gonna fall down.
 What? You gonna take your picture without your pants?
 You want to be the kid without your pants, hm?
 What is the matter?
 What is the matter with you?
 I can't help you if you don't tell me.
 I can't make it better if you don't tell me how.
 There is nothing wrong with you, Tris.

There is nothing wrong with you that we can't fix.
Okay?

TRISTAN

Daddy said I'm retarded—

FIONA

He didn't.

TRISTAN

He said I'm hecka mentally challenged.

FIONA

People say lots of things they don't mean.
Now get up.
Get up from the floor, Tris.
Get up from the floor.

(FIONA firmly drags TRISTAN to the chair, seats him
down)

PHOTOGRAPHER

All right, Mommy, time's up.

(FIONA steps aside from TRISTAN)

PHOTOGRAPHER

Eyes nice and wide now.
(suddenly, as GUY) Open your eyes, Fiona. Nicer. Wider.
Open your eyes and look at him.

FIONA

I can't.

GUY

There's nothing wrong with him.
There's nothing wrong with something wrong with him.

(The PHOTOGRAPHER takes out a comb, combs Tristan's
hair)

TRISTAN

DON'T TOUCH ME!

FIONA

Tristan—

TRISTAN

DON'T TOUCH ME!

FIONA

I'm sorry.

(TRISTAN moans, rocks)

PHOTOGRAPHER

Don't sweat it: I used to work with special ed, too.

FIONA

Oh, no, he's not-

PHOTOGRAPHER

Eyes nice and wide and-

(Before FIONA can respond, the PHOTOGRAPHER takes the photograph.)

Camera flash. We see the photograph of Tristan: dark, scary, off.

Back to the present)

GUY

Then what?

FIONA

And then we get back to class.
And he knows just the right thing to make a bad day worse.
Someone's mother had brought in cupcakes, a birthday.

(FIONA produces a chocolate cupcake in her hand)

FIONA

He wouldn't stop screaming until he could have one.
So I let him.
And he pooped in his pants.
I tried to grab him.
He ran away.
So it just slid down his leg,
Brown and sticky.
He didn't even know they were making fun of him.
He thought they were friends.
He thought he had friends.
It made me angry.
I wanted to slap them.
But I couldn't.
Because I only have one child.
And he was covered in shit and cupcake.

So I put him in the car, on newspaper,
And I get a visit and a tree and a Ted.

(Next: a summary of her scene with the PRINCIPAL,
who hands her a letter, a tree, and dirty laundry in
the course of the scene. Leaves float out of there
objects. Rotely...)

Fiona. PRINCIPAL

Ted. FIONA

A word? PRINCIPAL

Which word? FIONA

Tristan. PRINCIPAL

That word. FIONA

More than a word. PRINCIPAL
Several words.
Three months and four.
Special
Ed
Problem
Child
Joanne

(to us) That retard. FIONA
(to PRINCIPAL) I didn't-
We don't.

Facts and socks. PRINCIPAL

A letter. FIONA

A leave. PRINCIPAL

FIONA

A leaf.
A tree.

PRINCIPAL

A tree of absence.

FIONA

A lovely parting gift.

PRINCIPAL

Just for now.
Leafed off.

FIONA

Fuck off.

PRINCIPAL

Fiona, please.

FIONA

How long?

PRINCIPAL

Six months.
Foot and a half.
Maybe something good'll grow,
Just not your kid.

(The PRINCIPAL disappears. FIONA is left holding all the items from the PRINCIPAL, along with her word jar and newspaper.)

FIONA

Happy
Picture
Day
You
Asshat.

(The MAN appears and hands the green and blue sweater to FIONA. She holds it at arm's length)

FIONA

And I got back in the car and I left.
I drove.
He sat.
He sat picking shit off his legs and into his hair.

I told him to stop.
 I told him- (stops) Nothing.
 I told him-

MAN

Nothing?

FIONA

I told him-
 Now sit still.

MAN

(as FIONA) "Sit still, you move one more inch and I'm getting the yardstick. We get home, and I am getting the yardstick!"

FIONA

I didn't say that.

MAN

No?

FIONA

I didn't say it like that.
 I didn't want to hurt him.
 I just wanted to scare him.
 I couldn't find the napkins.
 It was soaking through the newspaper,
 Onto my new car smell.
 He was right under my nose and he stank.
 He was right under my nose and I wanted him anywhere else but
 there.
 So I pulled into a gas station and I tried to find something that
 might make him better, might make him clean.
 I pulled into a gas station-

TRISTAN

For gas?

FIONA

No.

TRISTAN

For candy?

FIONA

No.

TRISTAN

Then what?

Nothing.

FIONA

We're going in for nothing?

TRISTAN

Yes.

FIONA

I want some.

TRISTAN

No.

FIONA

I want nothing.
I want some nothing!

TRISTAN

Keep it up and you're gonna get nothing.

FIONA

(FIONA opens the car door. TRISTAN squirms: the
bathroom dance)

I have to go.

TRISTAN

You just went.

FIONA

(TRISTAN squirms more)

I have to go.
I have to go.
I HAVE TO GO.

TRISTAN

You go when you get home. You get home in five minutes.
You can't wait five minutes?

FIONA

I HAVE TO GO!

TRISTAN

I'll be back in a minute.
A moment.

FIONA

A pause.
A beat.
A breath.

(Everyone breathes, exhales)

FIONA

An eternity.

(FIONA focuses back on TRISTAN)

FIONA

Now sit up.
Now lock the door.
Now stay inside.

(As soon as FIONA turns her back, TRISTAN transforms
into the MAN)

MAN

Now turn your back.
Now walk away.
Now tell me—

(FIONA hears the MAN, but doesn't turn around)

FIONA

Yes?

MAN

How long does it take to lose a child?

FIONA

Who are you?

MAN

I was right under your nose.

FIONA

Wait.

MAN

Didn't you hear?
I have to go.
(as TRISTAN) I have to go!

(Without turning, FIONA continues to walk away)

FIONA

I went in and got myself a Kit Kat and a break.

(FIONA has a Kit Kat and a handful of napkins. She unwraps the Kit Kat, ducks around a corner, out of Tristan's view, and eats it. The chocolate gets on her hands, her mouth. She licks her fingers, savors)

FIONA

And when I came back, the door was open.
And I thought I saw something—
Something like—

MAN

A blue Honda
A red Civic
A black SUV with the windows tinted
A '94 Camero with the radio on
And a sticker on the bumper:
"Kiss Me, I'm Irish."
"Ithaca is Gorges."
"New Jersey is for Pedophiles."
"Kiss Me, I'm Gorgeous."
"Kiss Me Goodbye."
"Kiss Me I'm Gone."
I'm gone.

(A wind carries the MAN away, along with all the words in the word jar)

FIONA

But I turn around.
The ground is slick with shit.
I bang my hip.
I stub my toe.
And I get back up.
And by then, there's nothing.
Nothing on my hands but guilt and chocolate,
Brown and sticky.

(FIONA with her empty word jar. She has no words of her own)

FIONA

And a voice telling me something
Something like—

(A police officer speaks to FIONA. The following is spoken as normally as possible, even if there is

constant revision and rewinding of the dialogue. The voice is kind, gentle. FIONA as the officer...)

FIONA

Mrs. Hamlin?
 Can you hear me?
 If you hear me
 Tell me what I'm saying.
 What am I saying?
 Would you like a seat?
 Wouldn't you like a
 Wouldn't you like to know
 Where he is.
 Where is he?
 Can I get you anything?
 I can get you anything except your
 Husband? Do you have a husband I should
 I should call your husband.
 We don't have to.
 Don't we have to
 Do something?
 Don't we have to
 We have to do something
 That's what happens when something gets taken.
 We have to
 Take something
 Back home you want to get?
 You want to get back home?
 We don't have to—
 But we should.

(Back to Fiona's perspective. She addresses us)

FIONA

And you realize:
 Life is just a series of
 We don't have to
 But we should
 We might as well
 As we can,
 Don't you think?
 You don't think.
 You just stumble.
 'Cause in times like this
 Words fail me.
 Like they just stop trying
 Like whatever they were doing before
 They don't now.
 Like they just don't even seem to—

(The MAN comes into view. He is now the OFFICER)

OFFICER

-hear me?
Mrs. Hamlin?
Can you hear me?
Can I get you anything you don't have anymore?
I can get you anything except

OFFICER/FIONA

Except
Accept

OFFICER

What you don't have anymore.
Mrs. Hamlin?
If you hear me

OFFICER/FIONA

Tell me what I'm saying is
What I'm saying is

OFFICER

Within the first forty-eight hours, ninety percent of missing children are found.
Seventy percent of the time, it's just miscommunication.
A car can travel up to a hundred-twenty miles an hour.
An ant can lift fifty times its own weight.
Cats can fall ten stories and survive.
Dogs can tell when you've lied to them.
The human body can survive five days without water
Three weeks without food
And years without love.
We are amazing.
We are brilliant.
We are what we make of it.
What I'm saying is:
Nine times out of ten, they're at home, at a neighbor's-
(as MAN) -undercover, underground-
(as OFFICER) -under a porch, at a friend's, hanging out-
(as MAN) -hanging from-
(as OFFICER) What I'm saying is
Nine times out of ten:
In the time it takes for a missing child to be reported
For the human body to decompose
For lungs to stop
Hearts to break
Ashes to ashes

And sons to dust:
 We've usually located the kid.
 So worst case scenario is-

OFFICER/FIONA

-this is it.

(The OFFICER produces a jar lid, seals the jar, and then disappears. The newspaper blows back into Fiona's hands.

FIONA takes a breath, looks around. Where is she?

She is back in the present. With GUY)

FIONA

Worst case scenario is: this is it.
 Just me, myself, and Guy.
 Worse case scenario is: he was right under my nose and I lost him.

GUY

And why can't you just say that?

(FIONA regards the newspaper as she says the following...)

FIONA

People want a story.
 You only get one story.
 You can't say:
 I hit him
 and
 I loved him
 and
 he was sweet
 and
 he was spoiled
 and
 sometimes I wished he was something other than what he was.
 And
 he'd yell
 and
 he'd kick
 and
 sometimes I wasn't even sure he loved me, not even a little.
 People want black and white
 And all I've got is
 Green and blue
 Black and tan

Red and white with stripes all over.
 Brown and sticky.
 You know how long it takes to lose a child?
 In the time it takes to turn around
 Slip on shit.
 Bang your hip.
 Stub your toe.
 And get back up.
 Three minutes.
 And this is something I just can't get over.

GUY

What you can't get over—

FIONA

"—you go through." I know.
 But every day, I wake up and I see no way through. I see no way
 over or under or around or through.
 All I see is something we've gotten ourselves into that we can
 never get out of.
 I close my eyes and all I see are cantaloupes and can't-escapes and
 can't-even-sleep-at-nights.
 I close my eyes and all I hear is—

(The MAN switches from character to character)

MAN

(as PRINCIPAL) Tristan. It's about Tristan.
 (as DETECTIVE) More than enough guilt to go around!
 (as MAN) Take care of your things, or you're gonna lose them.

(The MAN blows out of the scene, along with any
 remaining leaves)

FIONA

In a word, he's gone.
 And I need to find who did it.
 'Cause otherwise, there's no one but me.
 Not even me, myself, and Guy.
 Just me, myself, and I.
 'Cause if I can't get justice, it's just us—
 (corrects) Just me.

GUY

Even if we don't get justice, we can still get dinner.

FIONA

Guy—

GUY
And better. We'll get better.

FIONA
But then what?

GUY
Then we'll get coffee—

FIONA
And dessert?

GUY
And dessert.
We'll get home.
We'll get sleep.
We'll get up.
We'll get going.
We'll get away.
We'll get back.
We'll get by.
We'll get fat.
We'll get ulcers.
We'll get older.
We'll get wiser.
And even if we never get over, at least we'll get through.

FIONA
How long will that take?

GUY
Three minutes. Six months. Foot and a half.
We'll go outside, we'll plant ourselves.
And maybe something good'll grow.

FIONA
I guess. I hope.

(GUY breaks the seal on the envelope and takes out the Picture Day photographs. He holds them for FIONA to see.)

GUY stops at a photograph. FIONA considers it.

GUY offers a hand to FIONA. They link fingers. FIONA edges closer to GUY, the chasm between them on the couch closes, just a little. They look through the photographs.

A noise. Perhaps the sound of a tree branch hitting a window. Or the wind blowing a door closed.

FIONA looks up. The shadow of a tree looms)

GUY

You hear something?

FIONA

No. No, just a tree. Probably just a tree.

GUY

How about that one?

FIONA

It's okay.

(FIONA and GUY look forward at a photograph. TRISTAN is behind them. Camera flash. A little awkward but, indeed, an okay family portrait)

FIONA

It'll be okay.

(The family portrait fades out, lights down)

Curtain.