

Dog Park

A full-length play

CHARACTERS

MADDIE - 40s-70s. *White. Midwestern born and bred. Sharp. Reticent. Specific. Funnier than you might think. PANCAKE's human.*

MELANIE (MEL) - 27-35. *White. Straight. Northeast born and bred. Sharp (in a different way than MADDIE), shy but not reticent. She is expansive. Prone to over talking when in the grip of any feeling, large or small. STEPHEN's human.*

JODY - 35 - 50. *White. Straight. MELANIE's older sister. Measured, with a quiet strength. Maybe even a bit weary. Though they look very much alike, JODY is more grounded than MELANIE.*

Synopsis

Dog Park is the story of Maddie and Mel, two women of different backgrounds and experiences who forge a new and unexpected friendship at a local Dog Park. As their friendship deepens and grows, it becomes apparent that Mel is living in an abusive relationship with her partner. Fear, shame and the painful reality of domestic violence test the power and limits of their friendship. The sudden appearance of Mel's sister Jody suggests that Mel's life has taken a dark and sudden turn and Maddie and Jody struggle to come to grips with this new reality. The play asks what we owe one another, not only those who are blood family but also those who are our chosen family. It is a play about confronting silence, trauma and our responsibility for others in this world.

TIME AND PLACE

Now. College town in Iowa.

NOTES

*The final scene--Scene Sixteen--is an epilogue depicting the first time MADDIE and MEL meet. It is the only scene that is not in chronological order.

*During scenes at the dog park both the dogs and the other people at the park are not seen but are instead suggested. Sound design can provide some cues here, but it's not necessary. The actor's behavior and the audience's imagination can effectively fill in the gaps.

*A slash [/] indicates the point of interruption in overlapping dialogue.

When the slash is not immediately followed by text, the next line should occur on the last syllable of the word before the slash--not an overlap but a concise interruption.

*Ellipses [. . .] indicate a moment where there is no spoken dialogue because what should be said cannot be said. Despite the silence, however, there IS an exchange of something between the characters. These are ACTIVE moments. They need not be long pauses, but the actors should make some space for them.

SCENE ONE

The dog park. MADDIE and MEL stand side by side, facing the same direction, watching the dogs. MEL has a soft splint on her left wrist. They've only just recently met. MEL occasionally glances over at MADDIE. After a few beats MADDIE speaks.

MADDIE

(To MEL)

Mind if I ask?

MEL

(???)

...

MADDIE

(Indicating MEL's wrist)

What happened with/your--?

MEL

Oh, nothing. Sprained wrist. See--

(Lifting the arm and moving it about)

It'll be fine. There shouldn't be any--There's no problem.

MADDIE

How--?

MEL

Jogging! Of all the things, right? That's what I get for trying to be healthy.

MADDIE

Well, you're young.

MEL

People always say that.

MADDIE

Well/

MEL

But younger than who? That's what I'm thinking.

MADDIE

Whom.

MEL

What now?

MADDIE

Younger than whom.

MEL

Mmmmmm--not sure about that...

MADDIE

Depends on whether "than" is a conjunction/

MEL

(Finishing MADDIE's thought)

--or a preposition. Yes.

(Regarding MADDIE with admiration)

Word Nerd. Dig it.

MADDIE

(Allowing MEL's admiration to sink in)

...

MEL

...

MADDIE

(Beat)

I think either one is correct. Technically.

MEL

(As if she'd just lifted the pause button on her previous thought)

Anyway, my point is-- younger than who/whom? I'm older than a lot of people--

MADDIE

You're young.

MEL

Well.

(Beat)

Whatever.

MADDIE

...

MEL

Hey. I saw you here ya know.

(Beat)

Before I mean.

MADDIE

(???)

...

MEL

Here at the park. I had to work up the nerve--I know it's hard to believe, but I'm really very shy.

MADDIE

You're right.

MEL

About what?

MADDIE

It's hard to believe.

MEL

(Beat)

Funny.

MADDIE

...

MEL

It's because I talk a lot. People think talkers aren't shy. But that's not true. They've done studies.

MADDIE

Studies?

MEL

Well, I'm sure *someone* has done *some* study, that's what I'm saying.

MADDIE

It seems

(Beat)

counterintuitive.

MEL

It does. But it's true! Anyway, I saw you here with--

(Struggling to remember PANCAKE's name)

--hang on, give me a sec, I'll remember.

MADDIE

Pancake.

MEL

Yes! PANCAKE! God! I can't believe I forgot his name!

MADDIE

...

MEL

(Awkward, several beats)

That's a pretty funny name for a dog.

MADDIE

I promised my nephew naming rights.

MEL

Awwwww! Cute!

MADDIE

He decided to name him after his favorite thing.

MEL

Pancakes?

MADDIE

Singular.

MEL

What?

Pancake. Singular. MADDIE

MEL
 (???)
 ...

MADDIE
 Yeah. It made no sense to me either. He was four.
(Beat)
 But a promise is a promise.

MEL
 Sounds like a sweet kid.

MADDIE
 He's nine now. Really into video games.

MEL
 Oh, that--/

MADDIE
 Plays this one called Naughty Bear/

MEL
 --sounds/cute

MADDIE
 --all about a murderous stuffed bear who goes around choking his friends with golf clubs,
 slamming their heads in car doors and then terrifying them into committing suicide.
(Beat)
 There's something about aliens too, but after a certain point...you know.

MEL
 ...

MADDIE
(Beat)
 He's not really into puppies as much anymore.

MEL
 I guess that's a blessing really/

MADDIE
 That's what I was thinking.

MEL

...

MADDIE

...

MEL

Jesus.

MADDIE

Yup. Can't say I regret not having kids.

MEL

...

MADDIE

...

MEL

William wants kids.

MADDIE

He/

MEL

I mean, he says he does, but/

MADDIE

William, your/--?

MEL

Yeah, my/—

MADDIE

And you?

MEL

Maybe when thing calm down/

*(Noticing **STEPHEN**)*

Oh, shit. Stephen!

*(To **MADDIE**, apologetically)*

He eating his poop again. Jesus.

*(Yelling out to **STEPHEN**)*

That's disgusting—Stephen, come here!!! Don't run away from me Mister! I'm talking to you!

*MEL exits, speaking sternly--and failing at it--
to **STEPHEN***

SCENE TWO

The dog park. MADDIE and MEL stand side by side, facing the same direction, watching the dogs. MEL is in the middle of a very animated story. MADDIE is listening attentively.

MEL
We were friends, ya know?

MADDIE
But he/

MEL
I think--well, I think he wanted it to be more.
(Beat)
Actually, no, I know he wanted it to be more.

MADDIE
Oh/

MEL
But I just didn't feel it. I mean, he was a sweet guy.

MADDIE
That's nice/

MEL
And he was Jewish, so/

MADDIE
That mattered? That he/

MEL
I mean it's not like we were standing around in Anatevka trying to figure out the blessing for the sewing machine, but ya know--/

MADDIE
So like a cultural--?/

MEL
Yes! Exactly! And of course my mother would have been--
(Gestures in a way that suggests her mom is nuts)
I mean, thank GOD she has Jody/

Your?/
 MADDIE

My sister/
 MEL

Ah/
 MADDIE

MEL
 With Jody and Sarah--that's my niece--she can do the whole Bubbie thing. Otherwise--ugh--the burden of disappointment!

MADDIE
 So she--your Mom--she liked Ben?

MEL
 God, yes! I mean, she would have been thrilled. Jewish babies everywhere, that's what she wanted.

MADDIE
 Your Dad?

MEL
 Oh he--
(Waves away just the idea of her Dad)
 He was so checked out, he wouldn't even...but Ben...I mean, he was a nice guy, ya know, he was. He just wasn't...

MADDIE
 What?

MEL
 I don't know. Exciting maybe? Just, something...you know how you want that person to have that thing you DON'T have? To finish you somehow. You want the other person...well, you know what I mean.

MADDIE
(She doesn't)
 ...

MEL
 But anyway--the family had this dog--his sister--Abby was Ben's sister-- and she was kinda the matriarch. Their mom died when Ben was nine.

Abby kinda took over that role, you know--and every Friday--it's like a thing we did--the roasted chicken, the candles, the whole Shabbos thing. It was actually lovely. I really appreciated it. I even enjoyed it. But this dog/

MADDIE

Yeah, what's with the dog?

MEL

So the family, right, they were--I'm not trying to be mean--but they were SUCH a cliché--the whole immigrant dream thing. The father owned a garment factory, made good, moved his family to the 'burbs. Big house, big lawn, everything big. The whole 9 yards. Then, boom--the Mom dies. Breast cancer. Totally tragic, right? So, you know, someone had to step up--

MADDIE

Abby was the oldest?

MEL

Oldest girl, yeah. I think David might have been a year older but--

MADDIE

Boys. It's not the same.

MEL

Exactly! But oh God this dog--and no one could--this dog was Abby's baby. Abby was the only one in the family that the dog hadn't taken a chunk out of.

MADDIE

You're kidding!?

MEL

Dead serious! The dog had bitten everyone! He was a freakin' terrorist. It was hi—laaaaarious. He was a mix, though mostly Chow...you know, with the/blue--

MADDIE

The blue tongue!!!

MEL

Yes! Why do I find that so unsettling?

MADDIE

Com-*plete*-ly unsettling.

MEL

Right?!!! Anyway, they had this piano. I mean, no one really played, right? But they had to have the piano--

(Speaking as a member of that family)

“Look, we made it! We escaped the shtetl! We have a Baby Grand that we never play sitting smack dab in the middle of the living room--”

MADDIE

How does that--?/

MEL

Yeah, no clue. Like I said, it’s an immigrant thing--

MADDIE

Wow.

MEL

I know! Again, hilarious, right? So Elliot, that was the Chow, that was his name...

MADDIE

Elliot?

MEL

YES! Elliot. Total WASP name. The Jews with the WASP dog. The vicious, vicious WASP dog--I mean, it’s like a master class in self-loathing, isn’t it?

MADDIE

(She’s not sure)

(Beat)

I’m not sure--

MEL

So Elliot keeps all his toys there, at the base of the piano, it’s/ like--

MADDIE

What????!!!

MEL

YES! Like a bunker, like Hitler in his bunker with all his stuffed animals, hoarding them, protecting them, screaming at them because he’s losing the war and the Russians are advancing on Berlin and he’ll never get to have babies with Eva Braun--even though he’s obviously impotent--and blah blah blah and if you get anywhere NEAR that piano Elliot starts that low, rumbling snarl, that growl, you know like--

(Imitates the sound of a low, warning growl from a big dog)

MADDIE

Oh, we all know that growl!

MEL

And I say to Ben, 'Ben, he's a Nazi dog.' And he's like, 'It's Abby's baby. She loves that dog.' And I'm like, 'Yeah, well, she loves a Nazi dog is all I'm saying.'

MADDIE

This is kooky.

MEL

Exactly! So every Friday we have the big dinner and every Friday when we're all done Abby goes around and gathers together all these leftovers--roasted turkey, brisket, stray bits of matzo ball, everything--I mean, it was like an entire Jewish deli cold case jammed into this--

(Motioning with her hands like she's forming a huge snowball)

--and she's pressing it all together into a giant--I don't even know what to call it--this giant meatball--just this big glob of food--and she goes over to Elliot and she pries his jaws open--

MADDIE

What?!!!

MEL

Yes! Like, you know, whaddya' call it?--a lion tamer! And then one of the other kids--I mean they're not really kids at this point they are all mostly adults--but one of the other kids has to throw the meatball into his mouth. Then Abby lets go and his jaws just clamp shut like a vice.

(Beat)

And that is how they fed Elliot.

MADDIE

Well, that's just plain nuts is what that is.

MEL

Yeah.

(Beat)

It was something.

MADDIE

...

MEL

...

MADDIE

...

MEL

...

MADDIE

So is William Jewish? I mean, your Mom--

MEL

(Laughing at the idea)

William?!!! Oh, God no. William's religion is science. Reason. Facts! He's--I mean, that's why he's always so busy...the research, the lab, that's his--he's--well, you know...he doesn't really go in for that kind of thing. He thinks I'm stupid for even. . .

MADDIE

...

MEL

...

MADDIE

What does he go in for?

MEL

I don't--/

MADDIE

You said he doesn't go in for that kind of thing. What does he go in for?

MEL

(Beat)

Just work. Work. Work. Work. And being at home. He likes a quiet home. A place he can think. He--He doesn't...he doesn't like things...competing, ya' know, for my attention so he likes to keep activities to a minimum.

MADDIE

...

MEL

He's kind of a loner.

MADDIE

(Beat)

Well...

What? MEL

Except for you. MADDIE

... MEL
(?)

He wants you around, right? MADDIE

Yeah. MEL

So not really a loner. MADDIE

I guess not. MEL
(Beat)

... MADDIE

... MEL

How does he do with Stephen--? MADDIE

Well, the thing about William is-- MEL
(Beat)

He's not a big...
(Air quotes)

"animal person". Mostly he just leaves Stephen alone. But, yeah. I mean, sometimes he gets jealous.

Of Stephen?! MADDIE

MEL

(Shrugs, a bit embarrassed)

...

MADDIE

That's ridiculous. Stephen's a dog. William's your husband.

MEL

...

MADDIE

...

MEL

Actually, we're not married--

MADDIE

What?

MEL

William and I. We're not married.

MADDIE

Oh, I'm sorry. That was rude. I just assumed--

MEL

NoNoNo, it's ok. I mean it's like we are...I just don't think he likes...I don't know....

(Turning her attention to the park,

indicating the dogs)

Umm, I think Pancake is...he's doing his thing/

MADDIE

(Grabbing a poop bag and exiting to the park)

Oh. Jeez. I didn't see--I'm on it.

MEL

(Yelling after MADDIE, teasing, forcedly jolly)

You're a dog park bad ass, Maddie!

MADDIE

(From offstage, affectionately)

Shut up!

MEL

A solid citizen, that's what you are!

MEL is left standing, alone.

SCENE THREE

The dog park. MADDIE and MEL stand side by side, facing the same direction, watching the dogs.

MADDIE
Mississippi?

MEL
Nope. Never been to Mississippi.

MADDIE
Me either.

MEL
...

MADDIE
I don't feel like we're missing anything.

MEL
...

MADDIE
Is that rude? That's rude.

MEL
I was thinking the same exact thing.

MADDIE
(Genuinely relieved)
Thank God. I'd hate for people to think I'm being a snob. But there's really nothing/

MEL
Well, there's the blues

MADDDIE
Yeah! but that's what my CD player is for.

MEL
You still listen to CDs. That's so cute.

MADDIE
What?

MEL

Never mind. You just enjoy your Lightnin' Hopkins CDs and forget I even said anything.

MADDIE

...

MEL

...

MADDIE

What about North Dakota?

MEL

Nope. You?

MADDIE

Once.

MEL

Fun.

MADDIE

'Lotta buffalo.

MEL

Really?!! That sounds—

MADDIE

But very far away—

MEL

What--?/

MADDIE

Sort of like,

(Narrating the experience of buffalo viewing)

“I think that’s a buffalo.”

(Beat)

“Wait. *IS* that a buffalo??”

(Beat)

“Yeah. I’m *pretty* sure that’s a buffalo.”

(Beat)

“OK. So I’ve seen a buffalo. Now what?”

(Beat)

Like that.

Oh. MEL

... MADDIE

... MEL

Bit of a let down/ MADDIE

I can see that. MEL

... MADDIE

... MEL

Rhode Island? MADDIE

Drove through it once. On my way to the Cape. MEL

Small. MADDIE

Teeny. MEL

They have pizza. (*Beat*)

... MADDIE

... MEL
(*Clarifying*)

In Providence they have pizza.

Doesn't everyone have pizza? MADDIE

MEL

Theirs is special. It has clams.

(Beat)

Wait. No. That's New Haven. But still. Providence pizza. It's special.

MADDIE

(Poo-Pooing the whole thing)

Pizza is pizza.

MEL

...

MADDIE

What???

MEL

Your Midwest is showing.

MADDIE

No. Not that!

MEL

The pizza thing.

(Beat)

It's a prejudice. I get that.

(Beat)

But one based in fact I'm afraid--

MADDIE

There's nothing wrong with Midwestern pizza.

MEL

Please.

MADDIE

("Aha!")

Chicago! Deep dish! That's special.

MEL

We're not having this conversation.

MADDIE

But—

MEL

No. There are some lines I just will not cross—

MADDIE

You're ridiculous.

(Beat)

Pizza is pizza.

MEL

I come from a proud people who would rather die/than-

MADDIE

*(Interrupting, looking out at the park,
incensed by something she sees)*

Oh I hate that!! That stinker!

MEL

What? What did I miss?

MADDIE

Milt.

MEL

Milt? Milt who? Do I know Milt?

MADDIE

He's been coming here since--Ug--He never picks up. Look at him.

(Beat. They both stare at the same spot)

He's acting like he doesn't notice. Look at that!! Honestly. That just frosts my cookies.

MEL

That's bullshit. Literally.

MADDIE

(Beat)

Well, not liter-

MEL

(Eye roll)

Just go with it, OK?

MADDIE

Sorry.

MEL

No worries/

MADDIE

And nobody says anything to him.

MEL

Do you want me to--?

MADDIE

NoNoNo. I'll just get it after he leaves.

MEL

You shouldn't have to--

MADDIE

I just don't want to start anything is all.

MEL

What's his story?

MADDIE

Who?

MEL

Milt! How does he get away with just letting his dog poop wherever he wants and no one ever says anything?

MADDIE

...

MEL

...

MADDIE

I don't--He's been coming here a long--well, longer than I've been bringing/Pancake--

MEL

So? What? He gets grandfathered into never having to deal with crap?

MADDIE

Well, I--He's--I think everyone's a little scared of him. He called the cops once because some girl didn't have tags for her dog. I mean, how was the poor girl supposed to know you needed a license just to let her dog run around in a park?

(Beat)

I think it was because she was--

(Beat, leaning in and whispering)

Black.

MEL

(Mirroring her whisper)

Why are we whispering?

MADDIE

(Flustered)

I don't—I wasn't--I mean African American. Black. You know.

MEL

OK. OK. No judgment.

MADDIE

...

MEL

...

MADDIE

I'm just saying I don't think he likes Black people is all.

MEL

I'm getting that.

MADDIE

...

MEL

...

MADDIE

(Tracking Milt's departure with her eyes)

There he goes. Stinker!

MEL

Ummm. . .

MADDIE

I better go pick it up.

MEL

(Giving her a "look")

...

MADDIE

What??

Nothing.

MEL

MADDIE goes off. Comes back a few second later with a “poop” bag, filled. Resumes her position next to MEL. After a few beats MEL reaches down and grabs the bag from MADDIE’s hands. MEL marches to the edge of the park and yells after MILT in the direction of his exit

MEL (CONT’D)

Hey! Milt! Yoohoo! You forgot something! Milt! No worries. We’ll keep it for you ‘til next time. OK? One good neighbor to another! I know you can hear me Milt! Milt!

MADDIE, equal parts impressed and mortified, stares straight ahead. MEL resumes her place beside MADDIE

MADDIE

...

MEL

...

MADDIE

...

After a good while, MADDIE nervously starts to giggle at MEL’s ballsy response

MEL

(In agreement, laughing too, but still indignant)

I mean, what the--???! What an asshat! Right?!!!

MADDIE and MEL stand quietly. Both content for a moment.

SCENE FOUR

The dog park. MADDIE and MEL stand side by side, facing the same direction, watching the dogs.

MEL
No Milt today?

MADDIE
Laying low.

MEL
Poor Milt.

MADDIE
Poor Milt?

MEL
Yeah. The crazy Jew yelled at him. How will he survive?
(Beat)
I should make him a kugel.

MADDIE
What's that?!!

MEL
We've been over this Maddie--noodles, eggs, sugar, maybe some cinnamon...

MADDIE
I know what a kugel is for crimminy sake. I mean, why would you do that?

MEL
(With total seriousness, as if describing a very elaborate strategy)
Oh I mean as an *aggressive* gesture. A violent gifting of carbs. It's an old Jewish trick. It's kept us alive for centuries. Even in our darkest hours. He'll never know what hit him.

MADDIE
...

MEL
...

MADDIE

(Clearly worried about this potential kugel dust up)

...

MEL

Oh for God's sake Maddie, I'm kidding. There's no worldwide Jewish carb conspiracy. I won't kugelize him.

MADDIE

(Genuinely relieved)

Thank you.

MEL

...

MADDIE

If I know Milt, he won't be out for long. You don't get that ornery by hiding from a fight.

MEL

Once a bully always a bully. I'm ready for him. Just promise me if anything happens you'll take care of Stephen.

MADDIE

(Turning to MEL, genuinely upset at the thought)

Don't say that.

MEL

(A beat too long)

I'm joking.

MADDIE

I would never let anything happen to Stephen.

MEL

O.K. O.K. Calm down.

MADDIE

...

MEL

I'm/sorry--

MADDIE

I'm just...

MEL

What? What's up?

MADDIE

(Beat)

I have a favor to ask you. And I don't like asking favors.

MEL

Well, what is it?

MADDIE

If you can't do it, it's fine. Really.

MEL

Maddie/

MADDIE

I'm serious. If you're busy--

MEL

Oh for God's sake Maddie what *is* it? What do you need? Yes, I'll do it.

MADDIE

How can you say yes? You don't even know what I'm going to ask.

MEL

Maddie. I've met old-timey mountain men who are less stoic and self-reliant than you, OK? You can ask for a favor.

MADDIE

You've never met any old-timey mountain men.

MEL

I have. Schlomo Corncrackers. Lived in a tar paper shack in West Orange, New Jersey. No one could stand to be around him cuz he got cream cheese all up in his mountain man beard whenever he ate his bagel and schmear. Sat all by himself at morning minyan with his handmade burlap tallit. Not the best personal hygiene, truth be told.

MADDIE

Now you're just making fun.

(Beat)

Plus I have no idea what any of that means.

MEL

I'm teasing. My point is I'd be honored to actually help you. And don't act so suspicious. Honestly, midwesterners--

MADDIE

Don't generalize.

MEL

I'm generalizing, you can't stop me! Someone doing you a favor is not an act of war.

MADDIE

Well, it's no Molotov kugel, I'll grant you that, but--

MEL

(Violent eye rolling)

...

MADDIE

I just don't want to impose--

MEL

Impose! Please impose.

MADDIE

(Beat, deep breath)

OK. Can you look in on Pancake this Sunday?

(Beat)

I mean, would you? Just for the day.

MEL

That's all? Of course!

MADDIE

I should be back by 9ish. He just needs his dinner and--well, if you wouldn't mind letting him out into the yard so he can do his business--

MEL

Mind if I bring Stephen over?

MADDIE

Sure, but--if--I mean--you don't have to spend that kind of time--it could just be a quick in and out. I know you're busy.

MEL

Are you kidding? Stephen will loooooove it. He lives to go into other people's houses. I think he was a realtor in a past life.

MADDIE

Well that's kinda--/

MEL

I can just see him--staging the kitchen. A bouquet of freshly cut peonies. Spritzing that chocolate chip cookie spray all around. Pointing out the craftsman-style built-ins--

(Lapsing into realtor speak)

"This mud room could easily be converted to a walk-in pantry"-- "All the fixtures are original"--"Window treatments are included--blah blah---Hanover crimped tin wall sconces--blah blah blah--an *EXXXXXCELLENT* school district--"

MADDIE

You make him sound gay.

MEL

Please. I don't have to make him sound anything. That boy's as gay as a summer hat. You can smell it a mile away.

*(Indicating **STEPHEN** in the park)*

I mean look at that saucy walk.

*(**MEL** and **MADDIE** track **STEPHEN**'s movement with their heads in perfect unison)*

MADDIE

(She doesn't disagree)

...

MEL

...

MADDIE

Not all gays talk like that. He could be a gay football player, or a farmer.

MEL

Ha! Gay farmers! That's a good one.

(Beat, but then genuinely curious)

No, seriously, there are gay farmers???

MADDIE

It's not just city folks who have that one unmarried uncle with unusually good taste.

MEL
(Mind blown)

Huh.

MADDIE
(Dryly)

Plus someone has to direct the church choir.

MEL

...

MADDIE

...

MEL

You make some good points.

MADDIE

Now if Pancake was anything in another life, he was a dog. And the life before that and the one before. That boy is dog through and through.

MEL
(Beat)

I don't disagree.

(Beat)

Well, I can't wait. It's gonna be a puppy slumber party hosted by yours truly. Maybe we'll do facial masks--

MADDIE

What--?

MEL

Oh, don't forget to give me a key before you go.

MADDIE
(An awkward beat)

Oh-I/

MEL

What?--/

MADDIE

No, it's fine. I'll--but you know, you don't need a key actually. I never lock my door. Or I could give you my garage code and you could get in through there.

Uh, okay.

MEL

MADDIE

...

MEL

...

MADDIE

You're right, you're right. I should probably lock my door.

MEL

...

MADDIE

So I'll get a key cut. OK? Yeah. I can do that.

MEL

...

MADDIE

What?

MEL

Nothing.

MADDIE

Is there something distastefully Midwestern about how we cut keys?

MEL

No--it's just--nothing. It's stupid.

(Beat, deciding it's not stupid)

It just makes me miss--back home--there were people--not even people I was that close to--but we somehow always ended up with keys to each others' places. Neighbors. People I knew from the gym or shul. "Can you let my dog out?" "I'm gonna be out of town 'til Monday, mind bringing in the mail?" That kinda thing. Nothing big. But still. Not nothing either. It felt...easy. Like someone was just...there.

MADDIE

It's your key. OK? It's yours. And me...I'm there. OK?

MEL

(Beat)

K.

MADDIE

...

MEL

...

MADDIE

But like I said I don't lock my door anyway so it doesn't matter.

MEL

(Seriously?)

Jesus Maddie! God! I was all, you know, having this poignant thing. You can be a real ass, you know that?

MADDIE

(With an exaggerated Midwest accent)

East Coast folks. Too sentimental. That's your problem. Makes you soft.

MEL

...

MADDIE is pleased. A kind of balance is restored. Another breath.

MADDIE

...

MEL

...

MADDIE

(Beat)

So, go ahead.

MEL

What?

MADDIE

I know you want to.

MEL

I have no idea what you're talking about.

MADDIE

Ask me why I'm gonna be gone Sunday.

MEL

(Desperate to act casual)

Hey. You wanna leave your front door open for every psychokiller and Jehovah's Witness with a grudge, that's your business, fine. You want to share with me why you're out of town, fine. If not--

Maddie

I'm guessing poker's not your game.

MEL

(Beat)

I'm strictly a go fish gal. I don't even have the stomach for gin. I start sweating. It's ugly.

MADDIE

I have to drive up to Oxford. We're moving my mom to a...a facility.

MEL

Oh.

MADDIE

It's been/

MEL

I'm/

MADDIE

No, it's overdue. She just--she needs more looking in on. And my sister's way up north, busy with the kids and all, so/

MEL

Really, I--

MADDIE

She doesn't want to admit it, but she knows it's time. It's /just--

MEL

Hard.

MADDIE

Yeah. Leaving the farm. Her and my/ Dad

MEL

Oh, God, yeah.

MADDIE

I mean, he *was* that farm. That's all she had left of him. So it's like--

MEL

...

MADDIE

...

MEL

It's like she's losing him--

MADDIE

--all over again.

*MADDIE and MEL go into themselves,
standing beside each other looking out at the
park*

MEL

...

MADDIE

...

MEL

...

MADDIE

(Chuckling softly to herself)

...

MEL

What?

MADDIE

Schlomo Corncrackers. What the heck...?

MEL

(MEL shrugs and smiles)

...

MEL and MADDIE stand together, quietly, but perhaps a bit closer in this moment.

SCENE FIVE

The dog park. MADDIE and MEL stand side by side, facing the same direction, watching the dogs. MADDIE is more animated than usual.

MADDIE

At least let me at least pay for half!

MEL

It's a gift, Maddie. A gift.

MADDIE

You didn't need to--

MEL

I know. I wanted to. Really.

MADDIE

His old bed was fine.

MEL

So keep it. He'll have one upstairs and one downstairs. Like that British TV show. He can be a member of the landed gentry during the day and at night he can be a salt of the earth working-class butler or footman or whatever those people do for those other, richer people.

MADDIE

Mel--/

MEL

He could bring you snifters of brandy, or calling cards on a silver platter.

MADDIE

Somehow I don't really see Pancake watching public television.

MEL

...

MADDIE and MEL

(Simultaneously)

ESPN!

MEL

Totally.

MADDIE and MEL

(A moment of shared understanding)

...

MEL

But seriously, you know I love Pancake. I want him to have support, you know--
(She's making this up as she goes along)
for his...for his spine.

MADDIE

He sleeps on the floor half the time!

MEL

But what about the other half? Huh? What about that? Look, I get it. All we have in the house are cushions on the floor. Would I like a chair? Of course.

(A sudden bright idea)

OhOhOh, you know what Pancake needs--a fainting couch! He could use it for swooning on...or is it swooning upon?...like the Victorians!

MADDIE

You're determined to make him British.

MEL

*(Yelling out to **PANCAKE** in the park)*

Pancake, swoon boy!

*(To **MADDIE**)*

He's ignoring me.

MADDIE

Just means he loves you.

MEL

Well I'd hate for it to be unrequited...Do you think they make dog-sized fainting couches?

MADDIE

...

MEL

...

Are they for meditating?
MADDIE

Huh?
MEL

The cushions. You said you sit on cushions.
MADDIE

What? Oh God no! I couldn't meditate if you put a gun to my head!
(MEL mimes a gun with her thumb and forefinger)
"Meditate you bastard. Before I splatter your brains all over this white Berber carpet."

...
MADDIE

They're just, y'know...pillows.
MEL
(Awkward)

So you don't have a couch/ or a--
MADDIE

We did...but...
MEL

What?
MADDIE

William decided to get rid of all the furniture.
MEL

What? What has furniture ever done to him?
MADDIE

He thinks furniture makes you lazy. He thinks it's bad for one's
(Using fingers for air quotes)
"character." And something about posture. He'll go on and on about it if you get him started.

(Recalling MADDIE's comment)
That's funny. "What has furniture ever done to him?" Seriously, that's funny.

MADDIE

Thanks, but--

(MADDIE is unusually overcome by emotion)

--I mean, what--

MEL

(Genuinely concerned)

Maddie. What is it?

MADDIE

...

MEL

...

MADDIE

I guess...what I'm wondering is... what *DOES* William like exactly?

MEL

(Uncomfortable)

...

MADDIE

...

Something has cracked open a bit. Something sharp and unexpected.

MEL

...

MADDIE

I'm /sorry--

MEL

No /it's

MADDIE

It's none of /my--

MEL

I just--

MADDIE

I should've--

MEL

(Suddenly stopping, checking watch)

Shit. I have to go!

MADDIE

Honestly I'm really am very--I had no right--

MEL

(Sincere)

I really, really have to go. I promised William--Stephen! Come here!--I'll see you tomorrow, OK?

***MEL** exits to go get **STEPHEN**. **MADDIE** stands alone, frustrated, conflicted, not knowing what to do with her hands. She stops for a moment, gets very still as her eyes focus on something happening in the park. With a curl of her upper lip and a disgusted shake of the head she removes a plastic poop bag from her pocket and walks towards the park muttering under her breath.*

MADDIE

Jerk!

***MADDIE** exits into the park, poop bag at the ready, steel in her step.*

SCENE SIX

MEL alone at dog park. On edge. Looking out to see if she spots *MADDIE*. Nothing.

MEL

(Turning her attention to STEPHEN who is doing something unseemly)

Stephen! Remember what we talked about...no!...no!...

(MEL is mollified because STEPHEN is now behaving)

That's better.

(Beat)

I love you! I love you very, very much.

(Takes out phone. Dials)

Hey. At the park. Look. Um. I'm sorry about the other day. Really, I don't want you to worry. Everything is fine, William even said he might be willing to--

(Spotting MADDIE approaching, she hangs up)

Hi! Jeez, I was getting--

MADDIE

(A bit out of breath)

Sorry I'm late--

MEL

No, no, don't--

MADDIE

I was on phone with my sister. Honestly, if breathing didn't come naturally to that girl I'd have to shoot a YouTube video just to show her how to do it.

MEL

Oh.

(Making a cringing face)

Sorry.

MADDIE

No, I mean, it's fine it's fine it's fine. I just--

(Beat)

I don't know how two people can grow up with the same parents, in the same town, go to all the same schools and be so darn--

MEL

What does she do--?

MADDIE

Works at a doggie day care.

MEL

(Trying a little too hard)

Oh, so you both like dogs. That's something.

MADDIE

Yeah, I mean, we grew up with them. Border Collies mostly. When the farm was still running at full tilt. Later Mom got into little--oh, what are they?...look like Ewoks...

MEL

Pekingese? Shihtzus?

MADDIE

Yes! Shihtzus. That's it! What is that? German?

MEL

*("German? Seriously? That sounds
German to you?")*

Uhhh...I believe it's/ Chinese.

MADDIE

Little mops that never worked a day in their life, but they made her happy. So *(beat)* you know. Whatever. I wish she could have a pup where she is now. It would really--her mood, ya know? I think it would really do her some good. Honestly, I think some of the staff at that place cut their teeth as guards at the local SuperMax. So many darn rules. I'm surprised they don't strip search the poor souls, bring in drug-sniffing dogs to check their walkers for illegal stool softeners or something. You'd think they'd give 'em a break. She's lived this long, she's earned/

MEL

Maybe you could find another place--

MADDIE

I was thinking about that. She's--she won't complain, that's not her way. But she lights up whenever I show her pictures of Pancake--

(Long beat)

I just wish she had more focus, ya know?

MEL

Your mom?

MADDIE
No, my sister.

MEL
Oh.

MADDIE
(Beat)
Sorry, I'm all over the place today.

MEL
No worries.

MEL tentatively reaches over to place a hand--very gently and quietly--on MADDIE's back. It's the first time they have ever touched and it feels surprisingly freighted with unspoken emotion for both of them. MADDIE accepts this gesture--briefly--and then as if sensing that any more would be too much MEL removes her hand, retreats to her regular position and they both exhale.

MADDIE
I mean, yeah, it's great, the doggie day care thing and she--she also has this business...well, it's not really a business...not *per se*...she makes earrings.

(Beat)
When did people start making earrings? Didn't you just used to buy them? Now everyone makes jewelry. It's--I don't know...I mean, I don't get it, but if you really want to do it, just do it, ya know? Really learn how to do it and make a go of it. It's like she's just waiting for someone to come by and--fix it all--or...I don't know.

MEL
...

MADDIE
...

MEL
You know/

MADDIE
What?

MEL

Never mind.

MADDIE

No. What?

MEL

Sometimes just loving someone can--

(MEL stops, unsure of whether to continue)

MADDIE

What?

MEL

Loving someone is work. And it can be a LOT of work. Lots of energy--having to worry all the time.

(Beat)

I don't know. It sounds stupid now that I say it out loud.

MADDIE

I was talking about the dogs. Those little German dogs.

MEL

Yeah. Not German by the way.

(Beat)

And I think it was about more than the dogs.

MADDIE

(Trying her best to take in what MEL is saying)

No. You're right.

(Beat)

I shouldn't judge. I just wish she would--I don't know--step up, know how to do things, and if she doesn't know she should learn. I mean, how hard is it? Just learn to take care of yourself, right? Jeez.

MEL

...

MADDIE

...

*MADDIE and MEL stand quietly side by side,
facing the same direction, watching the dogs.
MEL looks down.*

SCENE SEVEN

The dog park. MEL is throwing a variety of toys, sticks, tennis balls, hoping STEPHEN will retrieve. Nothing. MADDIE is trying not to say anything. But then--

He's not going to—
MADDIE

Just let me try one more—
MEL

MEL throws something-- another ball/stick/toy. It has a desperate quality to it, plus she doesn't have much of a throwing arm

He's not—
MADDIE

I thought dogs—
MEL

He's not—uh—it's not in his nature.
MADDIE

Well, he's a dog I mean, I thought—
MEL

But not that type of dog.
MADDIE

What? Not a normal one—?
MEL
(Fraught)

No. He's just not a retriever.
MADDIE

I thought dogs liked balls.
MEL

Some do.
MADDIE

MEL

...

MADDIE

...

MEL

But not him?

MADDIE

Again. Not in his nature. It doesn't mean anything.

MEL

...

MADDIE

(Maybe this will put MEL at ease)

He's a lover. Not a chaser.

MEL

...

MADDIE

...

MEL

I suppose there are worse things. If I just love him he'll be fine, right?

MADDIE

You worry too much. It doesn't mean-- he's smart. He's just not interested. There's a difference.

MEL

I just want him to be happy.

MADDIE

He's happy.

(Beat)

Is everything OK—?

MEL

You think he's happy? Really? Tell me the truth.

Maddie

(MADDIE sighs)

Yes.

He's happy.

(Beat)

***MADDIE** and **MEL** stand side by side, looking out at the park. **MEL** is still fraught.*

SCENE EIGHT

The dog park. 3 a.m. A penetrating cold hangs in the air along with a light rain. MEL is alone at the edge of the park. She doesn't have an umbrella or a rain jacket. It is obvious that, whatever her reason for being there, she left her house in a hurry. She is both empty and on edge, staring out at STEPHEN. After some time she calls out to him.

MEL

Stephen. Come on sweetie. Let's go back.

STEPHEN does not come. MEL stands silently. It continues to rain.

SCENE NINE

The dog park. MADDIE is alone and on her cell phone.

MADDIE

Um. Hi. It's me again. Just calling to see. . . . Well. I feel funny leaving a message. Hope you're OK. I'm sure everything's fine. Hope Stephen is OK.

(Beat)

Milt was here today. Didn't pick up after Yukon. Duh! No surprise there. I didn't do it.

(Beat)

Well, I did. But not until after he left. I didn't want him to think I was cleaning up after him. I hate when he does that. He's just so—. . . I'm sure you're...you know what?... um. . . I think I'll just stop by. . . just to say hi...I hope William won't. . . I mean, I hope he won't mind. . . I don't know. . . if you get this and you don't want...well (beat) nothing (beat) I'll just stop by.

MADDIE hangs up. She stands silently watching the park.

SCENE TEN

The dog park. MADDIE is alone. MEL enters. She is wearing a baseball cap and sunglasses and stands a little further apart from MADDIE than she normally does.

Hey!

MADDIE

Hey.

MEL

MADDIE

...

MEL

...

MADDIE
(Simultaneously with "I'm sorry--")

I tried calling--

MEL

I'm sorry I didn't--

MADDIE
(Simultaneous with "I was--")

Were you--?

MEL

I was--

MADDIE
(Simultaneous with "Oh, sorry...")

What?

MEL

Oh, sorry...

MADDIE
(Indicating MEL's sunglasses/hat)

What's with--

MEL
Migraines. Sometimes.

(Beat)

I--

MADDIE
Ooooooh.

MEL
...

MADDIE
...

MEL
...

MADDIE
You know if you let me know/next time/ I--

MEL
Doesn't happen often, but when it does--whoa--it really knocks me out, ya know?

MADDIE
(Beat)
Yeah.

MEL
...

MADDIE
Did William--?

MEL
Stayed by my side the entire time--

MADDIE
Oh.--

MEL
What?

MADDIE
(Watching MEL)

Nothing, I . . .

MEL
*(Out to **STEPHEN**, with that sing-song,
 I'm-talking-to-my-dog voice)*

Who's a good boy? You took care of Mommy, didn't you? Are you a good boy? Yes, I think you are!

*(To **MADDIE**)*

The whole time. I couldn't believe it. What a little nursemaid.

MADDIE

. . .

MEL

. . .

MADDIE

I asked about William.

MEL

What?

MADDIE

William. I asked if William took good care of you. Not Stephen--

MEL

(Beat)

Oh, sorry--

MADDIE

No need to be sorry--/

MEL

William would have been there for me, I'm sure...but he had a big project due. He's soooo stressed right now. But Stephen, oh, what a sweetie. Such a good boy.

MADDIE

(Beat)

I stopped by--

MEL

(Genuinely surprised, she didn't know)

Oh.

MADDIE

...

MEL

(Recovering a little)

I didn't--

MADDIE

I spoke /with

MEL

William. Oh.

MADDIE

Yes. We spoke and he--

MEL

Oh, he's really stressed out about work right now--

MADDIE

Yeah. You mentioned that. *(Beat)* He didn't mention that you were ill--

MEL

Well, I mean, really, it's just a migraine. I mean, I'm used to them, I get them all the time/

MADDIE

I thought you said it doesn't happen often.

MEL

...

MADDIE

...

MEL

What I meant was, it's not that bad. It's not that big a deal.

MADDIE

...

MEL

...

MADDIE

Cuz I've heard they're pretty bad.

MEL

“Pretty bad”. Isn’t that a weird phrase? It’s like, people taste something and they say, “It’s AWFULLY good!!” I mean, which is it? Is it awful? Or is it good? Like, take a stand, ya’ know?

MADDIE

...

MEL

...

MADDIE

...

MEL

Mine aren’t. That bad I mean. I can handle them.

MADDIE

...

MEL

...

MADDIE

I would have--if you needed something I/ mean

MEL

Thank you/really

MADDIE

Or even just to walk Stephen. Or bring him here. I’m fine with that, it’s/ nothing really--

MEL

Oh, Stephen stayed by my side the entire time.

MADDIE

(Beat)

You said.

MEL

(Beat)

Oh, right.

MADDIE

...

MEL

...

MADDIE

...

MEL

Has Milt been here?

MADDIE

Came.

(Beat)

Went.

MEL

...

MADDIE

...

MEL

Poop?

MADDIE

(Holds up a bag of poop from Milt's pup)

...

MEL

(Beat, snort/laughs as if to say "It figures.")

...

MADDIE

...

MADDIE and MEL stand silently. MEL shuffles her feet, tries to get physically comfortable. She's not quite successful.

SCENE ELEVEN

The dog park. MADDIE and MEL stand side by side, facing the same direction, watching the dogs. MADDIE points out one of the dogs to MEL.

Oh look!

MADDIE

What?

MEL

Busby.

MADDIE

Who's Busby?

MEL

MADDIE

You've never met Busby?! He's a hoot! Little Basset with three legs. His official name is Tripod Busby, Paralympic King of Crescent View Park.

MEL

What does?--ok, that name is hilarious--

(Noticing the cluster of dogs in the distance)

God, it's like a rat king full of canines over there.

(Looking more closely)

What are they sniffing at? That better not be a chicken bone.

(To MADDIE)

I hate when people don't properly dispose of their KFC.

(Back to looking at the dog posse again)

Where's Busby? Wait, where's Stephen? Can you see Stephen? Is he OK?

MADDIE

What's a rat king?

(Beat, MEL begins to answer)

Never mind. Please don't tell me.

(Re: STEPHEN)

Yes, I can see him.

MEL

Why can't I?

MADDIE

(Pointing, trying to direct MEL's gaze)

Over here, more to your left, right there through the trees.

Mel

Which tree?

MADDIE

(Increasingly frustrated)

The oak.

MEL

Which one's the oak? I don't know from trees! Do I look like John Muir? Give me a direction. Longitude, latitude, something, anything!

Determined to make MEL see, MADDIE grabs MEL by the arm, pulling her over in front of her so she can share the same sightline. As she does she extends the other hand, pointing to the dog

MADDIE

Here, see him? Right there!!

MEL

(As MADDIE grabs MEL's arm, MEL winces and pulls away)

Owwwwwww!

MADDIE

God! I'm so sorry!

MEL

It's ok, it's ok--

MADDIE

What's wrong with your arm?

MEL

It's nothing. Just sore from yoga.

MADDIE

...

MEL

What?

MADDIE

Yoga?

MEL

I'm fine.

MADDIE

(With a finality and force that stops things cold)

No Mel! You are most definitely NOT fine!

The power of MADDIE's surprises them both.

MEL

What?

MADDIE

You always do that! Act like nothing's happened.

MEL

It is nothing! There's nothing to tell.

MADDIE

...

MEL

...

MADDIE

Nothing?

(Beat)

Nothing.

(Beat)

Jogging accident.

(Beat)

Yoga????!!!

(Beat)

Migraine.

Which is it?
(Beat)

MEL
 . . .

MADDIE
 Or did you just accidentally, somehow, on purpose, without looking just HAPPEN to walk into a door this time?!!!

MEL
(Quietly)
 Don't.

(Beat)
 Don't be mad at me.

MADDIE
 I'm not-
(Beat with a breath)
mad at you.

MEL
 You sound mad.

MADDIE
 I'm not mad. I mean, I AM mad, but not at you.
(Beat)

I'm frustrated.
(Beat)
 William doesn't like furniture. Doesn't like dogs. Not too many activities. Not too much noise. Like he expects the whole world to be carpeted so he can walk around without shoes! It's just...I don't know...there are two of you in that house, right? Not just him.

MEL
 You don't--I don't want you to worry about me.

MADDIE
 Well that's just plain silly and you know it!
(Beat)
 Mel, you're so--I mean, look at you. You've got so much going for you.

MEL
 . . .

MADDIE
 What are you doing with that guy?

MEL

(Beat)

I love him.

MADDIE

...

MEL

...

MADDIE

...

MEL

He's super stressed--

MADDIE

Stop! Stopstopstopstop. Everyone is stressed! I'm stressed! You're stressed! The mail carrier is stressed! My dentist is stressed! Filling cavities and having everyone hate you is stressful! That's not an excuse and it's not even a reason! You're not stupid, Mel. Stand up for yourself!

There is a uncomfortably long pause during which MEL and MADDIE say nothing. MADDIE is unmoored, teetering on the edge of something unknown. It is intolerable. In an effort to contain it, a door closes inside of her and she pulls back.

MEL

I-

MADDIE

No. I'm so--

MEL

...

MADDIE

I never should have--that was totally wrong. God. I'm so sorry. Please don't--

MEL

(Trying to find some place to land, failing)

...

MADDIE

It's--I'm just so upset about this thing with my Mom. My sister is useless, God bless her. And dealing with insurance, well--that's it, you know, that's the worst--I'm sorry.

MEL

...

MADDIE

Boy, fine one I am to complain about other people being stressed, huh? How 'bout that for the pot calling the kettle black?

MEL

Maddie, honestly--

MADDIE

No, Really, I never should have--I mean, I know, there are two sides to every story, right? I should just keep my nose outta---what I mean is I'm sorry if I was rude. There was no need for that kind of talk.

MEL

No, you weren't--It wasn't--

(Several Beats)

I don't know what I want. Not really.

(Several more beats)

Love. I know I want love.

MADDIE

...

MEL

...

MADDIE

(Cautious)

Maybe that's NOT love. That's all I was saying.

MEL

Maybe it's not as simple as that.

MADDIE

...

MEL

...

MADDIE

Or maybe it is.

MEL and MADDIE stare straight ahead and are silent.

SCENE TWELVE

***MADDIE** at the dog park. Alone. She scans the horizon for **MEL**. Nothing. Does this for a while. Each time she is disappointed. Then she switches her attention to the park, her eyes narrowing, her stare becoming insistent and focused. A few beats follow, then she gets a plastic poop bag out of her jacket pocket and heads into the park, muttering under her breath.*

MADDIE

Dammit Milt! This is the last time!

***MADDIE** exits into the park, poop bag at the ready.*

SCENE THIRTEEN

MADDIE at the dog park, alone, on her cell phone.

MADDIE

Well I don't know if it's an *emergency*. I mean, I don't know. Maybe it is. Maybe I'm just-

(Beat)

I don't know what it is actually.

(Beat)

Yes, of course I called.

(Beat)

No, I haven't. I woke up and her dog was in my yard.

(Beat)

I realize that's not a crime, sir. There's no need to use that tone.

(Beat)

No, you don't understand, Stephen's not a stray. She must have put him in my yard--

(Beat)

What? I don't---she lives with this fellow.

(Beat)

They moved here together so that--

(Beat)

The university. Some sort of research--I don't know titles. So they're--I don't know--I just know her from the dog park. I mean, not "just"--We're friends. She's my friend.

(Beat)

Yes! That's what I've been trying to--

(Beat)

Five days. Yes. It's just not like her--OK. Yeah. Can you do that? Sure. Hang on, it's in my phone.

(Pulls phone away from ear. Scrolls through to find an address. Back on phone.)

OK, here it is. 717 Orlean Terrace. The blue one, near that playground on--oh, OK. Right. Will you? Yeah, thank you. You have my number. It's probably nothing. I'm sorry to bother you.

MADDIE hangs up. Stares out into the park.

SCENE FOURTEEN

MADDIE at the dog park. JODY, who very much resembles MEL, walks into the park. JODY throws a ball after a dog and watches to see if he will chase it. From her expression we see that it just doesn't happen. She shrugs, stuffing her hands into her pockets, and wanders over to stand a bit apart from MADDIE. She gives a polite quick smile to MADDIE, just to acknowledge her, then stares out into the park. MADDIE looks at her. Thinks. Looks at JODY again, thinks some more. Finally--

MADDIE

Excuse me, I'm sorry...that's Stephen.

JODY

You know Stephen?

MADDIE

I do. I do. And I know...do you know Mel? Because you look/

JODY

Melanie. Melanie's my sister.

MADDIE

Oh. My God. Her sister. Of course. I can see the resem-- I'm so glad to--I'm so glad to finally meet you! Mel mentioned, but we never really--how is she? I've been worried, she hasn't been--we'd been seeing each other most days. With Stephen. I mean--here. At the park. God, I'm rambling. Sorry. Is she O.K.?

JODY

You must be Maddie.

MADDIE

Yes. Did she--?

JODY

Yeah, she told me about you. *(Beat)* She liked you.

MADDIE

Oh--well--that's--I mean, I like her too. I do. But, what's happening? Is she OK?

JODY

We don't know.

MADDIE

You don't/

JODY

I mean, she's missing/

MADDIE

I...what?

JODY

The police called. There was a missing person's report filed and...I was her emergency contact...we're the only two kids. Mom is still here--but she was in no state...I didn't mean to say 'kids', we're not kids. You know what I mean--

MADDIE

I called the police. A while back. They said they'd--they called it a wellness check. Who filed--?

JODY

William.

MADDIE

Oh.

JODY

(Watching MADDIE, assessing)

...

MADDIE

...

JODY

(Simultaneous with "Do you think--?")

I wanted--

MADDIE

(Simultaneous with "I wanted--")

Do you think--?

(Beat)

No please, you go--

JODY

I wanted to--I didn't mean to be weird--but I wasn't sure--Mel told me about you, and I was hoping if I came here--with Stephen... But sometimes, with Melanie, I couldn't always trust her/

MADDIE

Judgment? Her judgement of people.

JODY

(Though JODY says nothing, we can see that her answer is "yes")

...

MADDIE

...

JODY

She wanted so much to--

MADDIE

Yeah.

JODY

...

MADDIE

...

JODY

The police said..they don't know anything, really...I mean, what can they know? They don't know the person. They only know what they are used to seeing--as cops--and, well/

MADDIE

No.

JODY

This officer--she was a detective actually--she said, basically, there was very little they could do. If an adult wants to up and take off that's their prerogative. She kept saying it like--like Mel just decided to decamp for Sedona or Key West.

(Beat)

It was--frustrating.

MADDIE

I hate to--I don't want to sound--

JODY

There was no signs of--you know, anything obvious. And sometimes, she said, people go missing because they don't want to be found.

MADDIE

Do you think--?

JODY

I think that *(beat)*--

MADDIE

No, of course--

JODY

I've tried, really, don't think I haven't--

MADDIE

Of course not--

JODY

For years I've tried to understand what Mel--her choices.... This though--she's never left before.

MADDIE

Left William before, you mean?

JODY

William. Or any of the others. The other Williams. With Mel they all just seem like some version of fucking William. She'd crash with me, or with a friend. Couple of times with our mom. But never this long. . .

MADDIE

. . .

JODY

Guess there's a first time for everything though.

MADDIE

. . .

JODY

It's just--the only thing that makes me think--well, she's someone who needs people. Know what I mean? I can't imagine her just...taking off. Unless-

MADDIE

...

JODY

Fucking William.

MADDIE

He came to get him ya know. He came to get Stephen. What could I do? Stephen's not mine. He said Stephen must have gotten out of the house somehow. Why would he do that? He doesn't care about Stephen. He's jealous. He's jealous of a dog.

JODY

(Looking at **STEPHEN**)

I was just grateful he didn't--

MADDIE

Yeah.

JODY

But he's too smart to do that--at least not this soon/

MADDIE

Yeah, not so quickly.

JODY

Exactly.

MADDIE

I. Don't. Like him.

JODY

...

MADDIE

(Beat)

I don't like him one bit.

(Beat)

I don't think he's good.

(Beat)

I don't think he's kind.

(Beat)

He's jealous of a woman's dog.

(Beat)

He is NOT a good man.

JODY

Wow. You're a lot more generous than I am. I wanna watch him die a slow death.

MADDIE

(Beat)

That's it.

JODY

What?

MADDIE

That's the problem. Nice. I wanted to be nice.

JODY

(Not sure where this is going)

For what it's worth, Mel said you were nice.

MADDIE

No. I mean before. I wanted to be nice. That's what we do. Always so nice.

Midwesterners. We love to tell everyone how nice we are. It's our biggest export, like corn and casseroles and--and--

*(Speaking with stereotypical
"midwestern nice")*

"Huh, that's an interesting point of view I suppose..." instead of just coming out saying, "You're a fucking moron and you don't know a darn thing."

JODY

...

MADDIE

...

JODY

Darn thing? *(Beat)* Wow.

MADDIE

Oh God *(Beat)*. There you go. Even now I'm doing it. You see? Right there. But that's what I should have said. "You don't know what you want!" "You don't know what you're doing with him!" "You don't know what a--"

(MADDIE runs out of steam, it's all so enormous)

JODY

“If you stay with him long enough he’ll hurt you? You realize that don’t you. How can you be so stupid?” It’s like talking to a--

MADDIE

(Exhaling, deeply. A tremendous, unexpected release)

...

JODY

William claims he got back from work Monday and she was gone. Along with two of her suitcases, her purse and \$500 in cash. But I mean--

MADDIE

But he could easily have--

JODY

He’s not stupid.

MADDIE

No. He’s not.

JODY

...

MADDIE

Mel would never leave Stephen. Never.

JODY

...

MADDIE

...

JODY

I know.

MADDIE

...

JODY

I just--

(Beat)

I shouldn’t--

MADDIE

Please. Don't. I mean, I get it.

JODY

It's just so... So goddamn boring. Is that a horrible thing to say?

(Beat)

It's just so fucking unremarkable and workaday and ordinary.

(Beat)

Part of me has always been waiting for this.

MADDIE

Yeah.

(Beat)

I think I've been waiting too.

JODY

It's like a bomb from one of those stupid TV shows with the shady terrorists and the lone wolf hero who's supposed to save the day. It's all wires and sticks of dynamite and bags of fertilizer and the clock is running down.

(Beat)

Do you know that feeling? You're frozen. You don't know what to do. Your whole body tightens like a screw.

(Beat)

And you figure, at least if it blew, if you got to zero and the whole world just disappeared, something would be over. Done. No more waiting.

(Beat)

But, somehow, in my TV show--this one with Mel--ever since she was, what? 17? 18? Her first boyfriend? Her third?--the clock magically resets itself every time. Again and again and again. And it's counting down and I'm thinking, 'I've been here before--' or 'Maybe I can get used to this--'

(Beat)

But you never get used to it. You never can.

(Beat)

Then one day out of nowhere--

MADDIE

Boom.

JODY

Yeah.

MADDIE

...

JODY

And the clock didn't even get to zero. It just explodes. Because bombs don't make any sense. They are just things that want to kill something. But there you are. Trusting the fucking bomb instead of that cruel, hard stone in the pit of your stomach, the one that tells you everything you already know, that you've always known about him, about how this is all going to end. There's no lone wolf hero who's gonna save the day.

(Beat)

Just you and that cruel, hard stone.

MADDIE

...

JODY

...

MADDIE

...

JODY

(Exhales, exhausted)

...

MADDIE

...

JODY

(Looking out at dog park)

Stephen's a cutie. I'd seen pictures. Mel sent me tons of them. But in person I mean--he's a real sweetheart.

MADDIE

Yeah, he's a keeper. A good boy.

JODY

...

MADDIE

...

JODY

...

MADDIE

*(Looking at MEL, then looking out at
STEPHEN. A realization)*

You came for Stephen.

JODY

I promised Mel.

MADDIE

(Beat)

So did I.

*They regard each other, squarely, for a long
moment.*

JODY

...

MADDIE

...

JODY

A promise is a promise.

MADDIE

It is.

(Beat)

It is indeed.

*MADDIE and JODY stand side by side, staring
out at the dog park.*

SCENE FIFTEEN

MADDIE at the dog park. She is bundled against the cold. On the ground, next to her, sits a large gift-wrapped box. MADDIE stands there for quite a while. She stamps her feet a bit to keep warm. Shoves her hands into her pockets. Maybe she yells some encouragement to the dogs.

JODY enters.

Hey

JODY

Hey

MADDIE

They getting along?

JODY

MADDIE

There was some discussion last night about whether Stephen could join us on the bed. And a pretty tense negotiation about some freeze dried liver.

(Beat)

All in all, though, fine.

JODY

...

MADDIE

...

JODY

He's used to being an only.

MADDIE

Yeah.

JODY

It's good for them to be together though--

MADDIE

Yeah, I think it makes him less...anxious. He likes having someone. Ya know?

JODY

...

MADDIE

...

JODY

Like Mel.

MADDIE

(Beat)

Yeah.

JODY

...

MADDIE

When you headed out?

JODY

Flight's at 3.

MADDIE

If you need a ride/

JODY

No.

(Quickly)

But thank you.

MADDIE

...

JODY

It's not...I'd just rather say goodbye here. Is that--do you--?

MADDIE

I get it.

(Beat)

I should probably get them home. Stephen gets chilly and starts looking at me with those eyes. I draw the line at making him a hot toddy.

JODY

It's good to have boundaries/

True. MADDIE

... JODY

... MADDIE

... JODY
(Staring, intently, out at the dogs in the park)

He seems totally gay to me.

MADDIE
(Beat)

Right there with ya.

MADDIE
(Beat)

Hey, will you do me a favor?

JODY

Sure.

MADDIE
(Indicating someone in the park)

See that guy over there.

JODY

Yeah

MADDIE

That's Milt.

MADDIE
(Indicating the wrapped package)

This is for him.

JODY

Oh. OK.

MADDIE

It's something I've been saving for him. I've been waiting for just the right time.

JODY
(Sincere)

That's nice.

MADDIE

Yeah. I decided--well, I think Mel would really like him to have it.

JODY

Oh, that's lovely.

MADDIE

Don't wait for him to open it though. He's kinda shy about being the center of attention.

JODY

Gotcha. I'll just let him know before I take off.

MADDIE

Thanks.

JODY

...

MADDIE

...

JODY

*(Something unspoken and very strong
hangs in the air)*

...

MADDIE

Look. Remember. With Stephen I mean--anytime you want to--he's yours, OK. I mean, he's Mel's. So that means he's yours.

JODY

(Beat)

Thanks.

(Beat)

He's yours too.

MADDIE

...

JODY

...

MADDIE

So he can just be ours.

JODY

...

MADDIE

...

JODY

Sure. He's ours.

MADDIE

...

JODY

...

MADDIE

Just until Mel gets back.

JODY

...

MADDIE

...

***JODY** begins to say something. **MADDIE** begins to speak at the exact same time, anticipating what **JODY** is going to say, and not wanting to hear it. Their moment of simultaneously almost speaking stops the conversation, like a knot that they cannot untie.*

JODY

'Til Mel gets back.

MADDIE

Yeah.

***MADDIE** and **JODY** stand side by side looking out into the park, looking at what is missing.*

SCENE SIXTEEN

*Fourteen months earlier. The first time
MADDIE and MEL meet.*

*MADDIE is standing on the edge of the park,
watching the dogs play. She is aware and alert,
not vigilant. But she's watching. MEL ENTERS,
yelling after STEPHEN, who has now run to
join the other dogs.*

MEL

Be careful! Play nice! Don't--

*(Cringing a little, afraid STEPHEN will
get bullied. Then, speaking more to
herself than to STEPHEN)*

--don't get hurt.

*MEL moves to the edge of the park and
watches. She stands farther away from
MADDIE than she might normally stand, but
the distance is still a bit close too for MADDIE,
who is used to more space.*

MADDIE

...

MEL

...

MADDIE

...

MEL

Which one's yours?

MADDIE

(Indicating one of the dogs)

There.

MEL

Ah.

MADDIE

...

MEL

...

MADDIE

...

MEL

(Beat)

Nice dog.

MADDIE

He gets the job done.

MEL

Is he a—?

MADDIE

Husky

MEL

Oh I was going to say Eskimo or maybe a small Samoyed—

MADDIE

Husky.

MEL

Cuz he looks—

MADDIE

I think I know what kind of/dog he/

MEL

Sorry.

(Beat, recalibrating)

No, really, he's beautiful.

MADDIE

...

MEL

...

MADDIE

Thank you.

What's his name? MEL

Pancake. Maddie

Pancake. That's/ Mel

Well he's a boy dog. MADDIE

Um, OK. MEL
("That was odd")

... MADDIE

... MEL

What's yours—? MADDIE

Stephen. MEL

Stephen? MADDIE

With a "ph". MEL

Not Steven with a "v". (*Beat*)

... MADDIE
("That was odd")

... MEL

Does he not *like* Steven with a "v"? MADDIE

MEL
 What?

MADDIE
 I'm sorry, I /shouldn't—

MEL
 No, that's fine. You're teasing. I get it. People love to tease me. It's a thing.

MADDIE
 Still/it's--

MEL
 I know people here think it's stupid. I get it. Farms and all. It's a different relationship with animals--
(Lapsing into a very stereotypical dumb rural yokel voice)
 “Guess I better milk them cows!!!” —I mean, I wouldn't know the first thing about milking, or grazing or threshing or whatever so no wonder having a dog with—

MADDIE
 That's not what farmers sound like—

MEL
 Oh, I didn't—

MADDIE
 Farming is extremely stressful--

MEL
 I never--

MADDIE
 You never get a day off. Those cows have to be milked. 365.

MEL
 Oh, that's, I mean I/never--

MADDIE
 No one wants to marry a farmer. A whole way of life is just/ dying--

MEL
 Was/your-?

MADDIE

(Beat)

My father.

MEL

Oh.

(Really awkward beat)

I'm/sorry

MADDIE

It's just not that simple is all.

MEL

...

MADDIE

...

MEL

Well, I'm pretty simple. Foot in mouth. Hoof in udder. Ud-DERLY unaware of offending everyone I encounter. That's me, like, 95% of the time.

MADDIE

(Softening)

...

MEL

...

MaDDIE

How you could put a hoof in an udder? Have you ever SEEN a cow?

MEL

Only at Smith and Wollensky's.

MADDIE

???

MEL

Steakhouse.

MADDIE

Gotcha.

MEL

...

MADDIE

...

MEL

So/

MADDIE

So. Stephen. With a “ph”.

MEL

With a “ph”

MADDIE

OK.

MEL

...

MADDIE

...

MEL

Steven with a “v” reminds me of growing up in Jersey. Which I loved, don’t get me wrong! But there was this one kid in Sunday school, Stevie Lerner. Most DEFFFinitely Steven with a “V”, if you get me. That kid was the most—

MADDIE

Sunday school?

MEL

Huh?

MADDIE

No, I just--well, you said Jersey and you look—

MEL

(Beat)

Like I’m from Jersey?

MADDIE

Well.

MEL

(Beat. Then figuring it out)

We went to Sunday school too. Just not your kind—the bat mitzvah kind--

(Makes a vague gesture)

You know. Smoked fish. Hava Nagila. The occasional bris.

MADDIE

(Awkward and embarrassed)

...

MEL

It's not like--it's just different is all. With Jews there are no--/

MADDIE

(???)

...

Mel

(Beat)

Casseroles?

MaDDIE

(???)

...

MEL

Unless you count kugel.

MADDIE

I don't know what--

MEL

Baked noodles.

Maddie

Aaaah.

MEL

...

MADDIE

Well, you got the better end of the stick. I mean...noodles.

MEL

Yeah, those casseroles can be awfully heavy. But kugel that's, like, spa cuisine.

MADDIE

...

Mel

...

Maddie

*(Indicating **STEPHEN**)*

What's—Stephen--?

MEL

Heinz 57. Don't know. I didn't really care. I just wanted to rescue someone. Fall in love.

(Beat, to herself)

Is that silly?

(Beat, to Maddie)

Is it silly?

MADDIE

...

MEL

...

MADDIE

Not at all silly.

Mel

(Beat)

You know I really didn't mean—

Maddie

Hey. You're not entirely wrong. It's not like all farmers are rocket scientists. There are stupid farmers. That's fair.

MEL

(Highlighting her profile with a flourish of the hand)

And there's a strong semitic profile goin' on here. No denying it.

MADDIE

It's just—

MEL

Well, it's family, right?

MADDIE

Exactly.

MEL

...

MADDIE

You're going to like it here.

MEL

I hope so. I'm gonna try.

MADDIE

No need to try. We're the nicest folks you'll ever find.

*An awkward and an inexplicably sad moment
hangs in the air*

MEL

...

MADDIE

(Politely trying to extract herself)

Well, I should let you go-

MEL

Oh, I wasn't--

MADDIE

(Making one more polite stab at it)

Oh, no. I do tend to go on. I don't wanna--

MEL

No, it was great to--

*(Finally catching on. MADDIE wants to
leave.)*

But I *should* be getting home I guess. It was nice/

MADDIE

Yeah, looking forward to/

MEL

Yeah. Me too.

*They share a tentative smile. MADDIE exits,
calling after PANCAKE. MEL stands, looking
out at the park, satisfied--if only for that
moment.*

BLACKOUT

END OF PLAY

In developing my play, *Dog Park*, I have three specific goals.

1. Maddie is the heart of the play in that she is a stand-in our own complicity in refusing to see the trauma and pain of those around us. Without engaging in clumsy exposition, I need to reveal more fully, through *action*, the forces that drive her to resist engaging with the abuse Mel is suffering and to, ultimately, reckon with her transformation from bystander into friend and advocate. In this instance I would need the collaboration of both actors and a director as I re-write these sections.
2. In feedback I received at the Sewanee Writers' Conference, some readers felt that the relationship between Mel and Maddie was more than platonic friendship and that Maddie, specifically, had unexplored sexual feelings for Mel. Collaborating with actors who can get the words up on their feet would enable me to locate and develop this thread, as much of this would be conveyed non-verbally. I need actors who can embody the emotional text beneath the actual text.
3. Finally, I want to use the final two scenes to locate points of greater conflict between Maddie and Jody. Jody is a "version" of Mel, one who responds very differently to intimacy and friendship. The stronger this contrast is, the more powerfully Maddie and Jody's choices become. A director with strong dramaturgical insights would be invaluable towards this end.