

Plays for New Audiences

A DIVISION OF CHILDREN'S THEATRE COMPANY

2400 THIRD AVENUE SOUTH
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA 55404
612-872-5108

Something Happened in Our Town

By

Cheryl L. West

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Adapted from the book by

Marianne Celano, Marietta Collins, Ann Hazzard

(Illustrated by Jennifer Zivoin)

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 Watermarkly

CHARACTERS:

HARTLEY HOUSEHOLD

EMMA HARTLEY, 8
SUE HARTLEY - (EMMA'S MOM)
UNCLE MANNY

PERKINS HOUSEHOLD

JOSH PERKINS, 8
MALCOLM PERKINS, 16
CALVIN PERKINS, FATHER
BELLA PERKINS, MOTHER

MS. GARCIA, TEACHER

OUR KIDS:

DANIEL, white, 8
SOPHIA, black, 8
LING, Asian, 8
OMAR, Latinx, 8

*****There is no intermission*****

SCENE 1- WEDNESDAY MORNING

Side by side houses. The Hartley's live in one house (perhaps a raised ranch) and the Perkins live in the two-story.

The Hartley's house is more bohemian, shabby-chic (lots of yard sale kitsch) with a feminine sensibility. The yard is full of strewn toys, costume pieces, trampled flowers and bushes that are in desperate need of a trim. In the middle of this disorder is an oversized trampoline.

The Perkins house is slightly larger, perfectly appointed with well coordinated furniture, more modern than not and full of African-inspired artwork. The yard is neatly manicured with some flowers still in bloom. Could be a model house, nothing out of place, photo-ready.

At any given time we may see simultaneous action going on in both houses.

And we begin on...

WEDNESDAY MORNING

OUTSIDE IN EMMA'S YARD...Emma and Josh joyously jump on Emma's new trampoline. Their school knapsacks nearby. From inside the house, Emma's unseen small terrier, POPPY, annoyingly barks and whines.

EMMA

QUIET, POPPY! He can't stand it if I'm having fun without him.

JOSH

Wish I had a Poppy.

EMMA

Then why don't you get one?

ADD: INSIDE THE PERKINS HOUSE

Josh's father, CALVIN, packs his satchel for the day.

JOSH

My father says maybe we'll get a dog when my brother and I start acting more trustworthy. Never gonna happen with Malcolm.

A Top 40 radio station plays in background...

RADIO

"Happy Wednesday morning! Roll out and enjoy this beautiful Fall weather."

And we see MALCOLM, 16, in the Perkins house, combing his hair with purpose and precision, like the rare teenager who really does believe he's God's gift to the universe.

His mother, BELLA, knocks impatiently at the bathroom door. What follows is trigger quick and overlapping.

BELLA

Malcolm, you've been in there long enough.

MALCOLM

(Practicing his smile in the mirror)

Mom, your handsome son has fans to satisfy...

BELLA

(Chuckles)

Boy, if you don't get out that bathroom.

From somewhere in the house...

CALVIN OS

Bella, have you seen that file I was working on?

BELLA

No, but I'll help you look in a minute.

Bella exits shaking her head - another chaotic morning with her family of men.

POPPY howls even louder.

EMMA

He isn't used to me going off to school yet. We need music. He'll stop crying if I start singing. Watch...

Just as Emma opens her mouth wide to sing...

JOSH

Don't you think we should get to the bus stop?

EMMA

Josh, we'll hear the bus when it makes the turn.

JOSH

But if we miss it...I...I never like to be late.

EMMA

Josh, you worry too much...

Poppy howls again. Emma sings high pitched and off-key. Poppy answers her with a howl and does indeed quiet as Emma gets louder...

JOSH

(cupping his ears)

Emma...Emma! Stop! Singing is really not your thing. And I really don't like to be late.

Josh jumps off, starts carefully assembling his things, methodically putting on his jacket, straightening his clothes, then carefully putting on his glasses.

JOSH (CONT'D)

I think I hear the bus.

EMMA

(Jumping off too)

Josh, will you stop with the bus already??? Now, since we're best friends you'll always stick by my side at school, right? Especially with recess.

JOSH

I guess.

EMMA

I'm just so glad you moved in so now I have a best friend right next door to play with everyday.

JOSH

I guess. Since my brother became a teenager, he really doesn't have much to do with me anymore.

IN MALCOLM'S BEDROOM

Malcolm snaps open his laptop or cell phone. He types on social media. He speaks what he types.

MALCOLM

(Typing)

"Finally got my license."

While we see

BELLA enter downstairs with her laptop, places it on her work table in kitchen. Begins retrieving bagels, spreading with jam/cream cheese and putting them in separate brown bags while...

JOSH

All Malcolm cares about is when he gets to drive next.

MALCOLM

(Typing)

"Your boy is one step closer to freedom from the parents, especially the Dad."

BELLA

(Yelling up)

LET'S GO GENTLEMEN!

CALVIN

Is Malcolm ready? And did Josh do his chores this morning? Did he take out the garbage before you let him go next door?

BELLA

Yes, honey. He took out the garbage.

CALVIN

MALCOLM, LET'S GO! Bella, can you help?
I'm still missing a folder.

He disappears to find the folder.

BELLA

Calvin, I only have two hands. I'm trying to get
you two a little breakfast together.

*Bella opens a cabinet and the hinge breaks which leaves the cabinet
door hanging. She exits to find something to repair it.*

EMMA

Well, at least you have a brother but now you
have a best friend in me.

JOSH

Really? I'm your best friend?

EMMA

Of course, silly! We're always together. Wait, I'm
not your best friend?

JOSH

Just that I never had a friend that looked like
you....

EMMA

Cause I'm a girl?

JOSH

Well yeah... plus...

EMMA

Cause I'm bossy sometimes?

JOSH

I'm used to bossy. I got a brother, remember?

*Just as the blustery, UNCLE MANNY enters. Both Emma and Josh
immediately brighten with excitement.*

MANNY

Hey, hey, hey! How's my favorite niece?

EMMA

I'm your only niece Uncle Manny.

MANNY

Emma I see you got your clothes fighting each other again. Are you ever going to wear just one color or one pattern at a time?

EMMA

No, because I'm artistic and creative, that's what Sue says so I have my own unique style.

MANNY

Ok, Miss Creative. Hey partner! Josh, my man.

JOSH

Officer Manny, How come you don't have on your uniform?

MANNY

(smiles)

Earned myself a day off. And when are you going to call me just Manny?

Manny initiates the elaborate handshake he does only with Josh or at least Josh thinks so. Clearly, Josh is enamored with Manny.

EMMA

(Sings dramatically)

"Just Mannnnnnny..."

JOSH

I'm not allowed. I have to put a handle on any adult's name or my mother makes me write out an apology.

MANNY

You're quite the interesting kid, Josh, I will say that for you.

JOSH

Interesting meaning good or interesting meaning strange?

MANNY

(Playfully rubbing Josh's head)

Pick your poison, kid, that's what my old man used to say.

Josh uncomprehending.

MANNY (CONT'D)

(examining the trampoline)

Your mother told me she got it. Goodness, did she buy the biggest one ever made?

EMMA

She said you paid for most of it.

MANNY

She wasn't supposed to tell you that. You like it?

EMMA

I love it!

MANNY

What about you Josh?

JOSH

I love it too...

MALCOLM

(Impatiently waiting by the front door)

DADDDDDDDDDDD? I THOUGHT YOU SAID YOU WERE READY.

MANNY

Your mother and I used to love jumping on these things.

Manny jumps onto the trampoline, does a trick or two, maybe makes some obscene funny fart noises while the kids egg him on. He's a hoot.

MALCOLM

DAD? Remember you said I could drive this morning?

Bella enters talking on the phone and carrying a mini electric drill.

BELLA

Yes, Friday is fine. I just want you to fix what's making the engine knock like that. And it needs a tune-up.

As Emma's mother, SUE, emerges onto her front porch. She, too, like Emma, has a dramatic flare when it comes to clothes.

SUE

Hey. I thought you were doing training today.

MANNY

Tomorrow. Underwater rescue, brushing up on my skills...I swear we cops get more training than surgeons.

SUE

Well, how about some underwater training on my kitchen sink. It's got a leak.

MANNY

Better stay a kid Josh, 'cause a man's work is never done.

JOSH

Well, my mother is the one that fixes everything in our house.

Sue laughs. Manny mock-frowns at Josh. Sue and Manny exit inside the house as

BELLA tightens the cabinet hinge with the electric screw driver.

BELLA

LET'S GO. GET A MOVE ON, GENTLEMEN!

As...

Our school kids - SOPHIA, LING, and DANIEL run by to catch the bus. Emma smiles hopeful and waves. Josh doesn't bother - he preoccupies himself with tying and untying his shoes, anything to avoid making eye contact. The KIDS scornfully look over at Emma and Josh.

EMMA

Hey, wait for us, we're coming... Look at the special candy I got for everybody...

Emma opens her lunch box, shows them the candy. Some of it falls to the ground. Emma flustered...

EMMA (CONT'D)

Oh no, jeez, I'm so clumsy. Don't you want some? Don't worry, I'll eat what fell...

Ling eagerly holds her hand out for some candy. Sophia slaps Ling's hand back.

SOPHIA

None of us eat that kind of candy...

DANIEL

(To Josh)

And what are you looking at four eyes?

Josh immediately drops his head, mumbles "Nothing."

SOPHIA

Let's go.

EMMA

Ok, but can you save me and my best friend Josh a good seat?

SOPHIA

Get a clue. Nobody likes either one of you.

DANIEL

(in Josh's face)

I thought you might be cool when you first came but now we all know you're just as weird as she is except she talks all the time and all you do is mumble.

The school kids take off running and laughing, leaving Emma crushed and Josh more nervous than ever.

JOSH

Emma, why did you have to say all that? You're not supposed to aggravate people when they already hate you.

EMMA

What did I say?

JOSH

That I'm your best friend and...

EMMA

But you are...

As Sue and Manny reemerge. Manny rolling down his sleeves.

MANNY

I'll be back this afternoon with my tools...

SUE

(To Josh and Emma)

Hey, why the long faces?

EMMA

Well, I was showing the kids...

JOSH

(Cutting her off)

Nothing. We have to get going.

ADD PERKINS DRIVEWAY

Overlapping, Bella emerges from the farthest side of her house, where Emma and Josh will have to run past to catch the bus. She holds the bagel bags.

SOUND of the school bus.

BELLA

(yelling in Emma and Josh's direction)

You kids get a move on. Hurry!

JOSH

Let's go Emma.

Emma takes off. Josh takes up the rear.

EMMA

Hurry Josh. Maybe the other kids saved us seats.

JOSH

(Mumbling)

They won't. They never do.

BELLA

(Waving)

Listen to your teachers.

Calvin and Malcolm emerge to take the bagel bags from Bella and just in time to hear Manny's loud voice...

BELLA/SUE

(Waving)

Have a great day.

MANNY

Put something in those coconut-heads now.

Calvin, Malcolm, Bella freeze - their frowns say it all. Sue hits Manny.

MANNY (CONT'D)

What? What did I say wrong?

EMMA

(yells back)

Don't forget career day, Uncle Manny.

MANNY (CONT'D)

Wouldn't miss it for the world.

JOSH

Your Uncle Manny is so cool.

EMMA

Yeah, I can't wait till all the kids meet him. Then watch, they'll all want to be my friends then.

Josh and Emma disappear.

BELLA

Oh. And my car is still not ready so ...another couple of days.

MALCOLM

Dad I think I'll drop you off up front so you don't have to walk all the way from the parking lot.

Bella and Calvin smirk.

CALVIN

Boy, you aren't slick. You want to drop me off so everybody can think you're driving without your father the principal.

Calvin and Malcolm head toward the car.

SUE

(Hitting at Manny)

Stop staring at them, wave.

Manny stupidly waves at Calvin and Malcolm. Calvin waves. Malcolm shoots Manny a hostile look, doesn't wave at all. Calvin slaps at the back of Malcolm's head.

CALVIN

Boy, stop being rude. It doesn't hurt you to be neighborly.

MALCOLM

Hey, don't mess up my hair.

They disappear.

Fort Wayne

youtheatre

MANNY

What's that kid's problem?

Bella re-enters her house.

MANNY (CONT'D)

Actually, if you ask me, the whole family acts like they're better than you.

Sue starts managing the yard chaos - moving the toys, pulling up a weed or two.

Fort Wayne

youtheatre

SUE

They do seem to keep to themselves but they're nice people. The mother especially. She's some kind of journalist.

MANNY

For the local paper?

SUE

I'm not sure. She writes some kind of blog, for black women or something.

(Indicating a bench/table)

Help me move this.

(taking in his suspicious gaze directed toward the Perkins house)

Would you stop it! You're so darn suspicious.

MANNY

I'm a cop. How else am I supposed to be? Man, this thing is heavy.

SUE

Stop being such a wuss.

School bell rings.

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SCENE 2 - SCHOOL

At school, no-nonsense teacher, Ms. Garcia, instructs at the front of the class.

MS GARCIA

Class, it's time for community check-in.

Emma claps excitedly. No one else does.

MS GARCIA (CONT'D)

Our Wednesday community word started with 'H'. And the word we agreed upon was...?

KIDS

Helpful.

MS GARCIA

Yes. So who would you recognize as helpful today?

Ling enthusiastically raises her hand with sound effects.

LING

Eew, eew, eew, Ms. Garcia. Josh sharpened me and Emma's pencils.

Sophia shoots Ling a "shut up" look.

MS GARCIA

Yes, very nice Josh.

EMMA

And Ling helped me look up a word I didn't know in the dictionary.

MS GARCIA

Yes, very nice Ling.

DANIEL

Hey, how come no one noticed I waited my turn in the line at lunch today?

MS GARCIA

Very good Daniel. Keep working on that cafeteria behavior. Anyone else?

JOSH

Emma... Emma smiled at everybody.

Emma grins at Josh. The other kids groan.

MS GARCIA

Yes, smiles are very important. Thank you Emma. Now before we dismiss for recess, let me again thank all who signed up for our Friday career days.

(Emma raises her hand excitedly with sound effects)

Just a minute Emma. So everyone, please thank your families... We can't wait to hear about their careers. I think this Friday right after recess, we have your uncle, right Emma?

EMMA

Yes, two more days. He's my Uncle Manny. And he's a very special police officer.

Over the loudspeaker we hear...

LOUDSPEAKER

Ms. Garcia... Could you step out in the hall for a minute.

MS GARCIA

Excuse me class. Quiet reading. That's all I want to hear in here.

Ms. Garcia exits and the kids immediately turn to Emma.

SOPHIA

So you have an uncle that's a cop?

LING

I'd never want to be a cop.

EMMA

But cops are the best people. My Uncle is brave and...

LING

Too scary.

SOPHIA

Ling-the-cling, you're always scared of something.

LING

I don't like it when you make fun of my name.

SOPHIA

So! Get over yourself.

EMMA

My uncle is like my dad!

SOPHIA

But he's not. You don't have a dad.

LING

Sophia, that's not very nice.

SOPHIA

Wasn't trying to be nice. Just sayin.

DANIEL

Well, my dad has an important job. He wears a suit and tie to work.

EMMA

What you wear doesn't make you important.

SOPHIA

You can say that again. Look at the no-matching clothes you like to wear.

DANIEL

It would be different if he was at least a detective or something. Like on TV.

EMMA

TV cops aren't real.

DANIEL

I know that Emma. I don't need you to tell me that.

LING

Cops take care of all the bad people.

EMMA

Right. Plus my Uncle makes a lotta money as a police officer.

LING

He does?

EMMA

Didn't you see that ginormous trampoline in our yard? He just bought that for me and....

DANIEL

Emma, you're such a braggart. It's sickening.

SOPHIA

(Giving Daniel high five)

Isn't she though, all day, everyday!

EMMA

My uncle did buy me a trampoline. Tell them Josh.

JOSH

We're...we're supposed to be reading.

SOPHIA

Will he at least be in his uniform when he comes? I do like their uniforms, dressed to impress.

DANIEL

Like will he have his gun?

EMMA

He has to. It's reg...regulation....his...his gun.

SOPHIA

Well my mother says we should get rid of all cops and their guns. Put 'em in jail so they can get a taste of their own medicine.

They hear Ms. Garcia returning. The kids make a mad dash to their desks, posturing as if they've been reading all the time.

Ms. Garcia attempts to hide she's been crying. She's searching for Kleenex, blows her nose as...

JOSH

(whispers to Emma)

Is Ms. Garcia crying?

EMMA

Ssh, I don't know. Maybe.

JOSH

But teachers never cry...

SOPHIA

Ms. Garcia, what's wrong with you? You in trouble with the principal?

Sophia laughs loudly at her own joke.

MS GARCIA

(sharper than she intended)

Sophia, you are supposed to be reading not concerning yourself with...with teacher business. For once can you do as instructed?

SOPHIA

Dang, I just asked a question. You didn't have to bite my head off. Wait, are you laughing at me Emma?

(Emma adamantly shakes her head no)

You'd better not be.

Daniel laughs loudly just as the Bell rings for recess.

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KIDS

Recess!

The kids line up and partner. Emma immediately takes Josh's hand. Sophia and Ling partner. Daniel without a partner but could care less. Instead, he begins whistling and covertly harassing Emma and Josh.

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SCENE 3 - WEDNESDAY'S NEWS

Fort Wayne
youth theatre

Lights shift to
PERKINS HOUSE


Where Bella talks on the phone to
SUE



Fort Wayne
youth theatre



Fort Wayne
youth theatre



Fort Wayne
youth theatre



Who's in a pin spot at her Salon. Note, Sue wears a cosmetologist smock/apron.

Sound of distant sirens inching closer to Sue's location.

SUE

(In the phone)

An hour or less. Then I should be there. Sorry, Bella, but I can hardly hear you with the sirens. Wonder what's going on?

BELLA

I'm sorry. I have another call coming in. Hold for a minute.

Fort Wayne
youth theatre

Bella clicks on to
ADD CALVIN



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youth theatre



CALVIN

It's me. Turn on the news. The school is on temporary lockdown.

Fort Wayne
youth theatre

What?
As Sue gets another call coming in.
ADD MANNY



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youth theatre



BELLA

Who wears his police uniform and looks rather overwhelmed. There's also the constant staticky sound of a police radio in the background.

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youth theatre

(Note: What follows is quick overlap.)



Fort Wayne
youth theatre



SUE

(Answering)

“Sue’s One Stop Beauty Shop. Expect the best and I’ll do the rest. How might I help you?”

MANNY

Sis, it’s Manny. Keep the doors locked.

CALVIN/MANNY

There’s been a shooting.

BELLA

What? Is Malcolm...?

CALVIN

Don’t worry. Everyone is safe but there’s racial overtones, if you know what I mean.

MANNY

A police involved shooting. They called us all in.

SUE

Oh, Manny.

CALVIN

For right now we’re erring on the side of caution.

BELLA

But....

SUE

What aren’t you telling me?

CALVIN/MANNY

Look, let me call you back...

SUE

Manny?

CALVIN

When I can...When I know more.

BELLA

I was just talking to Sue and...

MANNY

It's about to get crazy.

CALVIN

(Adamant)

I don't want Josh over there after school.

BELLA

But...

MANNY

Look, Sis... they're calling me. I gotta go.

CALVIN

I'll be home as soon as I can.

SUE

Manny, please be careful.

CALVIN

I love you.

MANNY

I love you.

SUE/BELLA

I love you, too.

CALVIN

I really thought moving my kids out of the city would buy me more time to keep them innocent. What was I thinking?



All hang up.

A tea kettle whistles. An anguished Bella pours the tea, while mumbling...

BELLA

Have mercy. Not again. Please God, not again.

She burns herself. Reacts. Fights back tears. Her phone rings. She answers.

SUE

Hello. Sorry, it's Sue again I think we got disconnected.

(Awkward beat)

So can Emma come over there after school?

(Bella hesitates)

I wouldn't ask, but my sitter is not available and usually my brother helps me out but...

BELLA

Of course. We'll see you when you get here.

Bella hangs up. She turns on the news. Sound of news about the shooting.

TV NEWS

"Details are still sketchy but at approximately ...an officer approached a vehicle where he suspected ..."

After a beat, Bella flips open her laptop, the light shadowing her face. She types and speaks.

BELLA

"There are laws to protect endangered species from extinction but where is the protection for black men, for our black sons? Another mother grieves today. But we all weep.

Lights shift to...

WEDNESDAY LATER - OUTSIDE

*News continues. Bella has disappeared somewhere in the house.
Emma and Josh arrive home from school.*

EMMA

Let's go play on the trampoline.

JOSH

Yeah, what a day. The teachers were so upset.

EMMA

They can't be that upset if they can't even talk about it.

(Off his clueless expression)

Uncle Manny says if you don't talk about your problems they just get bigger and bigger until they're Ginormous.

JOSH

(Anxiously looking toward his house)

Usually my mother is waiting on the porch...Wonder what's wrong?

EMMA

The bus was early so maybe she's on the phone. Sue's always on the phone.

JOSH

I should check in. I'll get in trouble if I don't check in first.

EMMA

Really? Your parents have so many rules. Too many rules. That's why I told Sue we should always play at my house.

JOSH

Rules make for order, Emma.

They enter the Perkins house where the TV news blares.

EMMA

Wow, the TV is on.

Emma excited by the sound, crosses to the TV, stands too close.

EMMA (CONT'D)

Wow, Sue never lets me watch TV except on the weekends.

Emma and Josh take in the violent news coverage of the protests. We catch snatches of the news. Somewhere in the house we hear a muted toilet flush.

NEWS

“There’s a heavy police presence but they are outnumbered by protestors. Once again, the situation outside the Fourth Precinct has turned violent in response to today’s deadly shooting by a white police officer of an unarmed black man...”

EMMA

Oh, no! Look, they’re throwing things at the police.

NEWS

(starting to fade in the background)

The situation began when the police responded to a domestic incident where the suspect was thought to have an outstanding warrant. Officers attempted to subdue the suspect who witnesses said kept repeating “man don’t do this in front of my kids...”

JOSH

Why are they fighting? It’s too scary.

EMMA (CONT'D)

What if they hurt...

Bella enters to find a horrified Josh and Emma fixated on the TV. Bella hurriedly clicks off the television.

JOSH (CONT'D)

Mom, what happened?

BELLA

I’ve had a little stomach ache all day. Sorry I wasn’t on the porch. How was school?

JOSH

It was fine except...

EMMA

It was like all the teachers had a secret..

JOSH

Yeah.

EMMA

A secret that they didn't want us to know about.

JOSH

Even our teacher was crying. Made me nervous.

BELLA

Honey, I'm sure she didn't mean to make you nervous.

EMMA

Is what's on TV a part of it? Did Sue say...

BELLA

Sue?! Do you always call your mother Sue?

EMMA

Well, that's her name. Did she say my Uncle Manny was ok?

BELLA

Oh, honey I'm sure he is. Your mother never said otherwise. There has been an incident in the community but I'm sure your mother would prefer to discuss it with you herself.

Before we see him, we hear the fiery Malcolm yelling...

MALCOM

Fort Wayne

MOM? MOM?

Malcom rushes in and carelessly flings his things to the ground. Calvin follows behind. He looks to have aged a decade since we last saw him.

MALCOLM

Mom, did you see where the cops killed another black man for nothing?!

Fort Wayne

MALCOLM!

BELLA/CALVIN

MALCOLM

What? But it was for nothing.

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Fort Wayne
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SCENE 4 - WEDNESDAY EVE - DINNER AT THE HOUSEHOLDS

SUE'S HOUSE

While preparing a dinner salad, Sue wears some type of Elizabethan makeshift costume.

She dances and sings loud and off-key to a pop song on the radio. After a beat, Emma enters. Sue twirls Emma around but clearly Emma's not the least bit amused or in the mood for upbeat. Sue finally gives up. Turns down the radio.

SUE

Hey, it's Wednesday night, your favorite night. Where's your dinner costume?

EMMA

Didn't feel like dress-up tonight.

SUE

(Dramatically bows/curtsies)

My dear lady, tell mother, what woe has befallen thee?

EMMA

Sue, why did the police shoot that man?

SUE

What?

EMMA

Josh's mom was watching the news when we got home from school and on the news it said...

SUE

Josh's mother let you watch the news? That's something I would never allow...

EMMA

But I feel sad for the man and his family.

SUE

The police thought he was reaching for a gun.

EMMA

Well Josh's brother said they shot him just because he was black.

SUE

That's not true. Your Uncle Manny will tell you, the police have a job to do, whether you're black or...

EMMA

And why do you call them black?

SUE

Boy, you sure are full of questions tonight.

EMMA

Josh is brown, he's not black.

SUE

Black is like an umbrella term, one that refers to African-Americans.

EMMA

But one day you were on the phone and I heard you say you don't even see color.

SUE

I didn't mean I didn't see color...

EMMA

Is seeing somebody's color bad? I mean you can't help but see it when you look at 'em.

SUE

Honey, what I meant was I don't let someone's skin color determine what I feel about them.

EMMA

Yeah like I don't understand why people call us White when I'm really pink and you're really tan.

SUE

White just means we're of European descent.

EMMA

So people don't like that umbrella either?

SUE

What do you mean?

EMMA

Josh's father and brother were so angry about white cops. It was scary. And like Sophia from my class thinks all cops should go to jail.

SUE

Well, that's just crazy. Who would keep the peace and keep people safe?

EMMA

I don't know but Sophia always talks angry like that and she's always angry at me.

SUE

I'm sure she's not always anything. No one is. I bet if you really think about it differently, you could think of times when Sophia is not angry.

EMMA

Our word was helpful today and no one said she was.

SUE

Some people require you to look a little deeper. An angry face could be covering up for a sad heart.

EMMA

Not Sophia. She never seems sad, just mad. Do you think Josh is going to grow up and be that mad too? One of the boys at school said black people are always mad and looking for a fight.

SUE

Well, he's wrong. That's a very prejudiced thing to say.

EMMA

(Stumbling over such a big word)

Pre-ju-dice?

SUE

Yes prejudice just means judging people harshly just because they're different from you.

EMMA

That's not nice.

SUE

No, and just think, you might be missing out on getting to know someone who could end up being your best friend.

EMMA

Well, Josh is my best friend. I used to tell Poppy she was my best friend but now I finally have a human best friend. It's all I ever wanted.

Phone rings. Emma suddenly very animated, jumps up and down.

EMMA (CONT'D)

Is it Uncle Manny? Let me talk to him. Please let me talk to him.

SUE

"Hold on please."
(Whispering)

It's not your Uncle. It's a client.
(Emma deflates)

Why don't you go do your homework while I'm on the phone.

EMMA

I don't have any.

SUE

Then go read a book, Emma.

EMMA

I don't want to.

SUE

Well, go do something while I take this call. Have you seen my appointment book?

EMMA

(Retrieving the appointment book)

But Sue...

SUE

Look, I'll be off in a minute.

(In the phone)

...Sorry about that, Julie, I'm sure we can squeeze in a haircut and highlights.

Frustrated, Emma slinks away.

SUE (CONT'D)

How's the husband and kids?

INSIDE PERKINS HOUSE

Where all sit at the table eating dinner except Bella who is assembling hot rolls on a platter in the kitchen. Jazz plays in the background. Malcolm still agitated.

BELLA

We can't know how other people are explaining any of this to their kids.

(Placing the rolls on the table)

Everyone has different values. Like little Emma calling her mother by her first name. Since she's rarely over here, I hadn't noticed it before but...

JOSH

(Giggling)

So, Mom, can we call you Bella...?

BELLA

Don't even think about it.

(Calvin laughs)

I don't see anything funny, Calvin. Did I put the butter on the table?

(Going to retrieve the butter)

I'm so discombobulated today.

MALCOLM

Could we stop talking about the neighbors and get back to what's really important?

CALVIN

We've exhausted that subject Malcolm.

BELLA

Anybody want anything else while I'm up?

A chorus of no's except....

CALVIN

Baby, a little hot sauce please.

MALCOLM

What if it there had been a white man in the car? Would the police still have shot him? No!

CALVIN

They probably wouldn't even have stopped the car. Pass the potatoes.

JOSH

You forgot to say please dad.

CALVIN

Please!

Bella brings hot sauce, butter and jam to the table. Eventually takes a seat.

JOSH

I don't understand. Why wouldn't they have stopped the car?

BELLA

Sometimes, Josh, white people are treated better than Black people.

JOSH

Do I have to eat these string beans?

BELLA

And that's not right. Everyone should be treated fairly.

JOSH

So, I don't have to eat these string beans?

CALVIN

Eat a few, boy.

MALCOLM

I'll tell you what, if a cop stops me...

CALVIN

You are going to follow his direction.

BELLA

Malcolm don't talk with your mouth full.

CALVIN

If a cop stops you, you will fall in line and do exactly...

MALCOLM

We're not in school, Dad. No need for principal-speak. Plus, you don't tell the white students to fall in line.

CALVIN

I don't have to.

JOSH

So you have different rules for the white kids, dad?

CALVIN

No I don't have different rules for them, the world does.

BELLA

Calvin, he's a little young to...

CALVIN

We can't continue to coddle him Bella. This thing is at our doorstep. He's got to be prepared. Being the color you two boys are means you're facing a different system, a system of inherent bias.

JOSH

That's a lot of big words, dad.

MALCOLM

I know that. Black people get arrested nine times the rate of white people...

JOSH (CONT'D)

We do? So I'm going to have to go to jail?

BELLA

Of course not. Josh, your father is just explaining...

(Pointedly)

In a little more detail than I would prefer...

CALVIN

The truth of the matter is little black boys grow up to be black men that people start to fear....

MALCOM

Not just fear. They hate us.

BELLA

Not everybody, Malcom...

CALVIN

Maybe not everybody but enough. Which means, you get stopped by the police, you'd better keep your hands visible, your mouth shut and no sudden movements, especially you Malcolm with that hot-headed temper of yours.

MALCOLM

I know back in your day Dad you had to kowtow but now... but now Black Lives Matter.

CALVIN

BOY, BLACK LIVES HAVE ALWAYS MATTERED.

MALCOLM

THEN WE NEED TO STAND UP AND FIGHT BACK.

CALVIN

FOOL, YOU HAVE TO STAY ALIVE FIRST.

BELLA

Calvin...

JOSH

Dad, why are you getting so mad?



CALVIN

I'm angry because we're still fighting the same fight, still being treated terribly.

BELLA

Calvin...

CALVIN (CONT'D)

And because thirty years later I still have to have the same talk with my sons that my father had with me.

JOSH

Can we talk about something else? I don't like this subject.

BELLA

Calvin, you're scaring him.

CALVIN

I'm sorry. Your mother is right. Anger alone does little unless you use it to make things better.

BELLA

That's what our black leaders have always done, like Harriet Tubman and Dr King...Stacy Abrams.

CALVIN

And President Obama, Fannie Lou Hamer and...

BELLA

All strong and smart and determined to change history...

CALVIN

Exactly what I've tried to teach you two and every student I've ever taught...

JOSH

Well, I'm strong and I'm smart so I can make history too, right Dad?

BELLA/CALVIN

Yes. Of course you can.

MALCOLM

Why are you telling him that? Black men are not valued for being smart and strong...please! We get killed for so much less.

(irritated; picking up his plate)

Look, can I be excused? Please?

Calvin nods yes.

CALVIN

What am I going to do with that boy?

SCENE 5 - MALCOLM'S BEDROOM

Malcolm types on social media. Video of the incident plays on his cell phone.

MALCOLM

(Types/ speaks)

“It’s about to jump off. We can’t wait for permission, from parents or anybody else. We have to protest! We have to take it to the streets.”

Josh enters.

JOSH

Can I sleep in here with you tonight?

MALCOLM

Yeah. Take the bed I got some homework to do.

JOSH

(Looking over his brother’s shoulder)

Is that the shooting?

MALCOLM

Yeah.

JOSH

How can you look at that over and over again?

MALCOLM

Because I’m studying what they do to us so that I never forget. That’s what’s up.

Clearly Josh finds this puzzling.

As lights shift to include

EMMA

Entering her bedroom dressed in pajamas. She cradles a stuffed animal on her bed. She picks up her princess bedside telephone, listens, then returns it to its cradle.

EMMA

Why hasn't Uncle Manny called to say good night? He always calls to say goodnight. I don't understand...if the shooting was an accident, then why can't people just say I'm sorry and make up? Why are they fighting so much in the streets and blaming all the police?

Lights dim to dark on the Hartley house as we shift to the

PERKINS HOUSE

Where Josh sits up in Malcolm's bed.

JOSH

Can I ask you something Malcolm?

MALCOLM

I thought you came in here to sleep.

JOSH

What does pick your poison mean?

MALCOLM

What?

JOSH

Emma's Uncle Manny told me to pick my poison...

MALCOLM

(Outraged)

See, that's what I'm talking about.

JOSH

What?

MALCOLM

Why would he even think to say that to you? A little kid. I got his poison alright...

JOSH (CONT'D)

But he didn't say it mean, Malcolm.

MALCOLM

No of course not, they're sneaky like that...

JOSH

But what does it mean exactly?

MALCOLM

Out of a cops mouth, it can mean anything.

JOSH

But...

MALCOLM

See, that's why they think they're going to get away with this shooting.

JOSH

So was the shooting an accident or did they shoot that man on purpose...?

MALCOLM

Look, dad and mom like to sugar coat. That's not me. Dad still stuck back in his day but this is a new day. Racial profiling is real. Like right now you're viewed as a kid, you know kinda cute, like rub your head cute, but one day you'll get my age or my size and then they'll automatically see you as some dangerous threat.

JOSH

But who will see me as a...

MALCOLM

The police, boy! Who you think we're talking about? But they can't keep shooting us because we're black.

JOSH

So does that mean, Malcolm, I could get shot too because I'm black?

Suddenly realizing the weight of his words. Forcing a grin.

MALCOLM

Never. See that's the good part about having a big brother. I'ma always be there to protect you.

JOSH

But what if...?

MALCOLM

Boy, that's enough questions. Now lay your skinny behind down. And don't be farting in my bed.

(Josh giggles)

I don't know what you laughing at. You got some funky farts.

Josh settles in. Malcolm watches him for a beat. Maybe throws another blanket on him. Once he thinks Josh is settled, he returns to his phone:

MALCOLM (CONT'D)

"Had to have "the real talk" with my little brother. Didn't mean to scare him but we all got to be soldiers in this war... Tomorrow night be there. Hashtag# Downtown PROTEST! Protest for justice."

SCENE 6 – THURSDAY MORNING

Bella and Calvin kiss goodbye.

BELLA

Be careful out there today.

CALVIN

Come on kids. I'm driving both of you to school this morning.

JOSH

(Rushing down the stairs)

But why? Why am I not taking the school bus?

CALVIN

Just until things settle down.

ADD THE HARTLEY HOUSE

Sue searches for Emma's backpack amidst the clutter.

EMMA

Wonder why Josh didn't come over this morning to jump on the trampoline.

SUE

Maybe he had some last minute homework.

EMMA

We're in the same class. We didn't have homework.

SUE

(Retrieving the backpack)

Here it is. Emma, you really need to put your backpack on the hook at night so we don't waste so much time looking for it.

EMMA

I forgot.

SUE (CONT'D)

Let's go. I'm sure Josh is waiting for you to walk to the bus.

They exit to...

THE HARTLEY PORCH

Just in time to see Josh, Malcolm and Calvin going toward their parked car. Josh starts for Emma's house while Sue stuffs notebooks and folders into Emma's backpack.

JOSH

Let me tell Emma...we're getting a ride....

CALVIN

I don't think that's a good idea.

EMMA

(Waving excitedly)

Hi Josh. Wait, I'm coming. Hurry up Sue. I don't want them to leave me.

SUE

Well, if you'd put your stuff in the night before...

JOSH

But why?

MALCOLM

(Pulling him away)

You want to give them an excuse to pull us over with a white girl in the car? Come on, be about reality.

JOSH

But she's my friend.

CALVIN

I know son. And you can still be friends but for now I'd rather be responsible for just my two. Just until things die down some...

MALCOLM

The optimum word is DIE!

CALVIN

Malcolm, that's enough.

EMMA

Wait, where's my lunch? I'm coming Josh.

MALCOLM

Anyway, that weird girl only wants to be friends with Josh because no one else likes her.

Josh is stunned by Malcolm's words but Malcolm oblivious to the seed he just planted.

The Perkins men exit. Josh takes one look back at Emma who waves sadly, then looks to her mother for explanation.

EMMA

Why wouldn't they take me? Is he mad at me?
Does his dad not like me?

SUE

Oh no, honey. You know his dad is a principal so maybe he had an important meeting.

EMMA

(Panicking)

But now no one is going to sit with me on the bus. And I won't have anybody to walk into class with or do recess with. Josh and I always do recess together.

SUE

I'd take you but I'm double-booked this morning...

Sue's phone rings

ADD MANNY

With police radio droning in background.

SUE (CONT'D)

It's your Uncle Manny.
(Answering)

Hey?

MANNY

I'm just checking in. It's been a nightmare but I didn't get to call Emma last night...

SUE

She's right here. She's not having the best morning.

Sue hands the phone to Emma.

EMMA

Hi Uncle Manny.

MANNY

How's my favorite niece?

EMMA

I'm your only niece. Are you ok?

MANNY

Yeah. You know nothing's going to happen to your uncle. I'm too ugly.

EMMA

(giggles)

You're not ugly. You're silly but not ugly.

SUE

Emma, I hear the bus...

EMMA

I gotta go Uncle Manny so I don't miss the bus.

MANNY

Ok, honey. I'll see you tomorrow at the career day. Stay safe out there. I love you.

EMMA

You, too. I'll see you tomorrow.

She hands the phone to Sue and takes off. Sue watches, waves, until Emma is out of sight.

SUE

(In the phone)

Thanks for that. She was having a bad morning.

MANNY

Who isn't? The facts aren't even in yet and they're calling us all, even the black cops, murderers. What's worse is the cop in question forgot to turn his body cam on.

SUE

Oh boy. Now they'll claim it was intentional - I can hear it now.

MANNY

Yep, and the media is having a field day. It's all about race with them so now everyone is second guessing themselves.

SUE

Of course they are.

MANNY

No one cares that most of us became cops to help people not hurt 'em. 'Course they don't mind hurting us.

SUE

Yeah, they hate you until they need you.

MANNY (CONT'D)

At least a hundred officers were injured last night. And we're already shorthanded. Some officers have just walked off, just quit.

SUE (CONT'D)

Can you blame them? There used to be a time when people respected cops.

MANNY

And now they spit at you as they loot and burn everything in sight...

SUE

I'm as peaceful as the next person, but let somebody try vandalizing my shop, they'll have a swift date with the undertaker.

MANNY

Okay Showdown-Susan. Dad was right, you should've been the cop. Look, I gotta go. I'll try to stop by tonight if I can.

He clicks off. Sue looks over at the Perkins house, then suddenly breaks off a few flowers from one of her withering bushes, arranges them as best she can, then marches next door to

THE PERKINS PORCH

Sue rings the bell. Bella answers the door. Sue offers the flowers to Bella.

SUE

From my garden but...but of course...

(admiring the Perkins yard)

Your bushes are so manicured. The few short months you've been here, this yard has truly been transformed.

BELLA

Well, I like order.

(Sue extends the flowers)

Thank you. These are...lovely.

SUE

I don't know if you remember but I own the salon up on Greenwood, Sue's One Stop Beauty Shop. So anytime you need a manicure or haircut...it's on the house.

BELLA

Oh, that's rather kind of you...

(MORE)

Fort Wayne
youth theatre

SUE

(Suddenly blurting)

It's just awful what happened yesterday. I come from a long line of cops. My father, my grandfather, my brother, so I've known first hand...how they have to make those horrible split-second decisions....

BELLA

I beg your pardon but I hope you're not calling what happened yesterday a split second decision.

SUE

Look, I'm just as sick over this thing as you...

BELLA

I doubt that.

Bella stares stone faced while Sue wrestles with apology or defensiveness. Decides on retreat instead.

Fort Wayne
youth theatre

SUE

Well, I just wanted to...

BELLA

Yes, thank you for these.

Sue starts to walk away, but abruptly turns back.

SUE

Look, my Emma has never made friends easily. But she and Josh are really good friends. They're so happy together. I'd hate to see that change.

Fort Wayne
youth theatre

Fort Wayne
youth theatre

SCENE 7 - SCHOOL RECESS

The kids play an intense game of soccer. At some point, Emma and Josh collide as Josh makes a pretty move and scores, surprising even himself.

DANIEL

Hey, alright Josh. Good move.

JOSH

I scored?

SOPHIA

Yay Josh! But don't do that again.

Josh grins, excited to have finally scored and received some adulation. Emma angrily gets in Josh's face.

EMMA

Did you push me down on purpose?

JOSH

Of course not but you were in the way.

EMMA

I wasn't in the way.

Emma gives Josh a retaliatory shove.

JOSH

Hey! Why did you have to push me?

KIDS

FIGHT! FIGHT! FIGHT!

MS. GARCIA

(Approaching sternly)

What's going on here?

KIDS

Nothing.

MS. GARCIA

I think we need a reminder. What was our 'K' word today?



KIDS

Fort Wayne
youth theatre

Kindness.

MS. GARCIA

Ok, let's put it into practice or should we end recess right now?



Fort Wayne
youth theatre

KIDS

No.

MS. GARCIA

Ok then. Josh and Emma find a way to talk it out.

Fort Wayne
youth theatre

JOSH/EMMA

Yes, Ms. Garcia.



Fort Wayne
youth theatre

Emma grabs Josh out of earshot of the others.

EMMA

Look, Josh, if you don't want to be my friend anymore...

Fort Wayne
youth theatre



Fort Wayne
youth theatre



Fort Wayne
youth theatre



Fort Wayne
youth theatre



Fort Wayne
youth theatre



Fort Wayne
youth theatre



JOSH

Who said that?

EMMA

Well, today you didn't get on the bus with me.

JOSH

That's because my father wanted to drive me.

EMMA

But not me?

JOSH

Look, Emma you're my friend..

EMMA

Supposed to be your best friend.

JOSH

Yeah... yeah but my parents are really worried right now...



EMMA

Me too. I'm worried about my Uncle Manny.

The kids rejoin to overhear the next.

DANIEL

Is your uncle still coming tomorrow?

SOPHIA

I saw the video. Folks are really hating on the police right now.

LING

Yeah, but my dad said the video didn't show what led up to it.

SOPHIA

It doesn't matter. The video doesn't lie! But of course, Ling-the-Cling...

LING

Sophia why do you always have to be so mean?

SOPHIA

Rich people don't like the truth.

LING

We're not rich.

EMMA

My mother said it was an accident.

LING

Yeah, an accident.

SOPHIA

Ling the Cling...

LING

My name is not Ling the Cling.

SOPHIA (CONT'D)

When's the last time you saw a cop shoot an Asian by accident?

DANIEL

My dad says a lot of people marching in the streets are being ridiculous. Without cops we wouldn't have any law and order.

SOPHIA

That's easy for you to say. They're not shooting people in the back who look like you.

DANIEL

Yeah, but people who look like me aren't doing all the crimes.

SOPHIA

I know you're not saying only black people do crimes. Y'all just sneaky with ya'lls crimes.

EMMA

Well, I know my Uncle Manny would never shoot anyone in the back, would he Josh? Josh?

Everyone looks to Josh who stammers nervously. Thankfully, the school bell rings. Everybody runs off.

JOSH

Wait up for me you guys.

EMMA

But Josh I thought we were best friends.

JOSH

You're only my best friend because you don't think anybody else would be and because nobody else likes you.

And Josh takes off running to catch up with the others, leaving Emma alone and totally distressed.

SCENE 8 - PERKINS HOUSE - THAT EVENING

Bella paces nervously. Finally Malcolm bursts through the door. Calvin follows behind. Josh takes up the rear. Bella relieved. Calvin and Malcolm are in the middle of a heated argument.

MALCOLM

You'd be surprised how many people from school are taking this seriously. The protests are all over social media....

CALVIN

Boy, what do I care about social media?

BELLA

Hi everybody.

Josh hugs Bella. Malcolm and Calvin continue to argue.

CALVIN

Mrs. Perkins, I am here to inform you, just in case you didn't know it, but you have a very aggravating son.

MALCOLM

Aggravating? I'm not aggravating.

CALVIN

No, you're just giving me indigestion!

JOSH

Me too. It's too loud.

Josh crosses to get a glass of water.

CALVIN

Now, you're not going to that protest. It's too dangerous.

BELLA

Malcolm, your father's right. People ended up in the hospital last night.

(a kiss to Calvin)

You're late. I was worried sick.

JOSH

Dad took us to have pizza. It was so good.

CALVIN

(Handing her a takeout container)

Figured you could use a break so I picked up that pasta you like.

BELLA

Yummy!

MALCOLM

But didn't you say the other day that this was the time to make history, Dad?

CALVIN

Only history you need to be making is with those books upstairs and those college applications.

MALCOLM

The way things are going, I may not even be alive to go to college.

JOSH

What? You're dying, Malcolm?

BELLA

Josh, your brother was just kidding. Why don't you go get started on your homework.

Josh exits.

BELLA (CONT'D)

You all need to be careful what you say around him. He's still a little boy.

MALCOLM

I don't understand. Everything in this house is black. Black books, music, black art, everything you ever taught us had to do with black pride and standing up for what we believe. Why doesn't that extend to the police?

CALVIN

You're not going and that's my last word on it!

MALCOLM

I used to think you were the bravest man I knew. When'd you get so scared dad?

Calvin wounded but works at not striking back.

BELLA

Malcolm!

Malcolm storms upstairs to his room, slams door.

BELLA (CONT'D)

My turn. I'll talk to him.

She starts to go after him. Calvin restrains her.

CALVIN

Let him cool off. Talking to him when he's like that just makes it worse.

LATER THAT NIGHT - HARTLEY HOUSE

Sue brushes Emma's hair.

SUE

You're awfully quiet tonight. What's wrong?

Emma sadly looks up at her mother, doesn't quite have the words yet for what she's feeling. She tearfully collapses in her mother's arms.

SUE (CONT'D)

Oh honey, what's wrong?

EMMA

I don't know what to do. People are so angry. Even Josh.

ADD PERKINS HOUSE

Josh comes downstairs in his pajamas. Bella works on her laptop. Calvin watches more news, immediately clicks the news off once Josh appears.

JOSH

Dad, you and Malcolm aren't going to stay mad at each other, are you?

CALVIN

No. Your brother's a bit of a hot head. But at his age, I was too.

JOSH

You Dad? Really?

Calvin chuckles, nods yes. Knuckles Josh's head affectionately.

CALVIN

Yeah, the apple doesn't fall too far from the tree. You can always see yourself in your kids.

EMMA

I don't know how to talk about it. It's so confusing.

JOSH

I'm so confused by it all, dad. People are friends, then they aren't...

EMMA

How can Uncle Manny be so good but people think he's not and they don't even know him?

JOSH

Some cops are good. They call you partner and make up special handshakes for you...

SUE

Because they think mistreatment by certain cops is a pattern...

JOSH

And then some shoot people by accident...

CALVIN

Accident is not exactly the term I would use.

EMMA

Pattern like my blanket and the clothes I like to wear?

SUE

Yes, but this is an unfair pattern that people feel keeps getting repeated.

JOSH

Dad, do you think Malcolm is right?

SUE

A pattern where some people may not treat other people fairly.

JOSH

That we should stand up and fight back...

EMMA

But why would they treat people bad on purpose?

CALVIN

What do you think?

SUE

Well for some the job isn't a good fit...

CALVIN

Do you think Malcolm is right?

SUE

Some get angry because they fear for their own lives...

JOSH

I know I don't like it when people get angry and yell.

SUE

But we can all set a new pattern.

JOSH

I never like to fight. I don't even like to argue.

EMMA

I really try but I...

CALVIN

What do you think people should do when they see something unfair?

SUE

What's the but? But what?

CALVIN

When they see people treated badly for no reason?

JOSH

I don't know...

EMMA

I just don't want to lose my friend.

JOSH

Maybe people should try talking about it?

EMMA

(Suddenly blurting)

Can you tell Uncle Manny not to come tomorrow?

SUE

But why...

JOSH

Emma says her uncle said if people don't talk about their problems they just get bigger....

EMMA

Because people are hating on cops now and if I bring one to school, they'll be hating on me even more.

JOSH

Then your problems will grow and grow until they're ginormous.

EMMA

Even Josh. He was the one person that used to treat me nice...

CALVIN

Well, her uncle might have a good point there.

EMMA

...Until all these bad things started happening.

Sue stunned. Takes a minute to choose her words carefully.

CALVIN

Well, I'll tell you what my father always told me.

SUE

I'm really sorry some of the kids are still acting a little mean to you.

CALVIN

It all starts with the man in the mirror.

EMMA

(nods yes)

Yeah, I used to pretend that they liked me even if they didn't.

CALVIN

And the choices that man makes.

EMMA

But then I got Josh and I didn't have to pretend anymore. He really was my friend.

CALVIN

You have to always ask yourself son, what kind of man do you want to see looking back at you.

SUE

(pulling Emma into embrace)

I'm sorry honey that you're having a difficult time of it.

EMMA

Yeah, I guess that's always going to be my pattern, no friends.

CALVIN

Now go check on your brother.

SUE

Oh, honey, that's not true.

EMMA

Yes it is!

CALVIN

Tell him about our talk. Might make a difference.

JOSH

(Hugs Calvin)

Ok...Goodnight Dad. Goodnight Mom.

*Josh runs upstairs. Bella and Calvin exchange freighted looks.
Calvin clicks back on the news.*

Bella tweets out...

BELLA

“I so wanted to spare my children from all of this, the growing up too fast, the spoiling of their innocence...Will they ever be carefree again?”

Lights dim on the Perkins house but maybe the glow of the TV news continues.

SUE

(Still holding Emma)

Trust me. This will all calm down but in the meantime, if you want to un-invite your uncle, Emma, you'll have to do that yourself.

EMMA

No Sue...you do it. You tell him. Please.

SUE

Honey, I didn't invite him, you did.

EMMA

So! He'll understand it if it comes from you.

SUE

Take it down a notch, ok? I need you to calm down.

EMMA

I don't want to calm down...I...

SUE

But Emma...

EMMA (CONT'D)

I want you to take care of it.

SUE (CONT'D)

Emma, I need you to listen. Your Uncle Manny would not want to ever make you uncomfortable. I tell you what, see how you feel in the morning. Then you can...

EMMA

Forget it. You're no help...You're never any help!

Emma storms off. Sue, exasperated beyond measure.

MALCOLM'S BEDROOM - SAME NIGHT

Malcolm packs flashlight, snacks, water bottle, lastly puts on a hoodie, embossed with "No justice, No peace."

He ties the backpack with rope, eases it out the window to the ground.

Just as Josh enters and is instantly alarmed by the sight.

JOSH

Malcolm, you're sneaking out???

Fort Wayne

youtheatre



MALCOLM

Shut up before they hear you. Go back to bed.

JOSH

Malcolm, you'll get in trouble.

MALCOLM

I can't worry about that. Look, there's power in numbers and I have to stand up and be counted...

JOSH

But you're wearing a hoodie. They say you get shot if you wear a hoodie.

MALCOLM

That's exactly why I have to do this, when my little brother equates a hoodie with getting shot!

JOSH

Why do you have dad's car keys? You're going to take Dad's car???

Fort Wayne

youtheatre



MALCOLM

I have to otherwise if he finds out I'm gone he'll come after me.

Fort Wayne

youtheatre



Fort Wayne

youtheatre



Fort Wayne

youtheatre



Fort Wayne

youtheatre



Fort Wayne

youtheatre



JOSH

Don't go. Please Malcolm. You're going to get in trouble.

Malcolm clasps his hand over Josh's mouth.

MALCOLM

Step off with the hysteria. Promise me, you're going to keep your mouth shut.

Josh reluctantly nods okay. Malcolm lets him go.

MALCOLM (CONT'D)

I'll be fine. I won't be gone long. Remember Brother code.

And Malcolm is gone out the window.

JOSH

Malcolm? Malcolm, don't go. PLEASE!

Josh beside himself with anxiety. Finally, he jumps in Malcolm's bed, assumes the fetal position, pulls the cover tightly over his head.

IN PERKINS HOUSE - LATER SAME NIGHT

Fort Wayne youth theatre *Calvin shakes Josh awake.*

CALVIN

Where's your brother?

JOSH

(Trying to activate his brain)

What?

Fort Wayne youth theatre **CALVIN** I said where is your brother? Wake up boy.

JOSH

Isn't Malcolm back? Oops.

CALVIN

Oops??? Boy, I'm one "oop" off of your behind. You have one minute to tell me what you know and it had better be the truth.

Fort Wayne youth theatre *Bella enters putting on her robe.*

BELLA

What's going on in here?

CALVIN

I was locking up the house and something told me to check. Malcolm's gone.

(To Josh)

Sit up. And I want the truth.

Fort Wayne youth theatre **BELLA** Gone where?

JOSH

Don't make me tell, Dad. I promised.

CALVIN

Boy!

Fort Wayne youth theatre **JOSH** He went...he went to the protest.

BELLA

On no...Calvin, you have to go look for him.

CALVIN

I would but he took my car and yours is still in the shop.

BELLA

We have to call the police.

JOSH

(Panicked)

NO! NO, NOT THE POLICE. PLEASE!

CALVIN

He's right. The police are the last people in this climate I want involved with my son. Damn, that boy...

BELLA

We just can't sit here and...

JOSH

But he said he wouldn't be gone long.

CALVIN

I'm very disappointed in you Josh. Very!

Calvin exits in a huff.

JOSH

I'm sorry, Mom.

BELLA

I'm with your dad on this one Josh.

JOSH

But Malcolm and I have this brother code...

BELLA

You can have your so-called code, but even under pressure, brother code pressure, group pressure, friend pressure, you need to always weigh what's the right thing to do. It's called growing up Josh.

She exits.

JOSH

But what if I don't want to grow up. Ever!

Lights shift to

LIVING ROOM - LATER

Calvin stares at the news. A determined Bella enters wearing an outer coat. She searches for her keys.

BELLA

Have you seen my house keys?

CALVIN

Now Bella...

BELLA

I don't want to hear it Calvin. I'm going to find my son. I don't guarantee bringing him back in one piece... I could strangle him for worrying us like this...

CALVIN

(restraining her)

Bella, you're not thinking straight. It's chaos down there.

BELLA

Well, us sitting around here twiddling our thumbs is certainly not helping anything...Let go of me...

(She struggles against him)

I said let go...He could be in trouble Calvin...Our son could be...

Calvin holds her until her anger dissipates.

CALVIN

Honey, he's going to be ok.

BELLA

Is he? He's a hot tempered sixteen year old black boy who thinks he's right about everything...

CALVIN

We'll give it another few minutes. If he's not back then I'll start walking. Better yet, Bobby lives down there. Maybe he can...

He takes out his phone to call but then he sees headlights. They exchange fearful looks.

MEANWHILE OUTSIDE

We see Malcolm escorted by Manny, who wears some riot gear. Malcolm aggrieved and indignant in zip tie restraints.

MANNY

(To Malcolm as he removes the ties)

I'm taking these off of you to spare your parents...

MALCOLM

Whatever, man. A little late to play hero.

MANNY

(overlapping)

....But I want you to remember what they feel like just in case you get any more bright ideas.

Bella turns on more lights in the house while Calvin peers out the window.

CALVIN

Looks like a cop car.

MANNY

(Noticing lights going on in the Perkins house)

Look, I could change my mind and really arrest you, you know that, don't you?

MALCOLM

Why? The first amendment affords me the peaceful right of protest...You are familiar with the constitution aren't you?

MANNY

You know you'd give Jesus a headache.

CALVIN

He's got Malcolm.

BELLA

(Joining Calvin at the window)

He does? Oh, thank God.

MALCOLM

I wasn't anywhere near that shoe store...

BELLA (CONT'D)

It's the Uncle from next door.

CALVIN

He's still a cop.

MALCOLM (CONT'D)

So I couldn't have taken any shoes.

BELLA

Just stay calm. I'm sure there's a reasonable explanation.

MALCOLM

But of course you saw somebody black running and of course we all look alike.

Working hard to appear in calm control, Calvin opens the door to let Manny and Malcolm in.

CALVIN

What happened?

MANNY

I think this one belongs to you. You mind if I come in? I'm Sue's brother... Sue next door.

BELLA

Oh, yes. I've seen you over there. Please, please come in.

Bella grabs Malcolm in a hug, checks him out.

Fort Wayne
youtheatre



BELLA (CONT'D)
Are you hurt?

MALCOLM
No mom...

Fort Wayne
youtheatre



MANNY
Just his pride.

Fort Wayne
youtheatre



BELLA
You're a mess. Go get out of those clothes and get a shower.

MALCOLM
Dad, I...

CALVIN
Do as your mother says. I'll be up there in a minute.

Fort Wayne
youtheatre



An awkward beat as Bella and Calvin face Manny.

Fort Wayne
youtheatre



MANNY
I didn't arrest him but I could've. He was in possession...vicinity of stolen property. He says it wasn't his.

CALVIN
Then it wasn't. My son has no reason to steal or lie.

Fort Wayne
youtheatre




Fort Wayne
youtheatre



MANNY
Actually, that's exactly what he said, among a lot of other things. The boy can really run his mouth. Make a good lawyer one day but does he ever shut up?

BELLA
Could I offer you something? A glass of water or coffee?

Fort Wayne
youtheatre




Fort Wayne
youtheatre



MANNY
Coffee if you have it. It's been a heck of a night.
(Takes in the house)
You have a real nice place here.

Fort Wayne
youtheatre



Watermarkly

CALVIN

(Glaring)

What did you expect?

Manny shifts uncomfortably.

MEANWHILE UPSTAIRS.

Josh grabs Malcolm in a bear hug, so relieved to see him.

JOSH

Malcolm, you're okay.

MALCOLM

Yeah, let go bro. I got chemicals all over me.
Don't let it get on your face.

JOSH

You smell like smoke.

MALCOLM

Long story. Right now I gotta shower.

JOSH

Who's downstairs talking to mom and dad?

MALCOLM

That cop from next door. We'll talk in the morning. Night.

Malcolm starts to exit.

JOSH

Malcolm, I tried not to tell.

MALCOLM

I know. It's ok little man.

Malcolm exits off, presumably to the bathroom.

Josh tiptoes to the stairs just in time to see his mother hand Manny a cup of coffee. Calvin trying to keep his rage in check.

MANNY

He could've gone to jail tonight just for being in the wrong place at the wrong time. With all the violence going on, another cop might've...

Fort Wayne

youtheatre

CALVIN

We know the drill. They see a black boy like him and instantly associate him with a crime.

MANNY

I can't deny that might happen on occasion.

CALVIN

Good! I was hoping you'd do me that favor and not insult my intelligence.

Fort Wayne

youtheatre

MANNY

Yeah, and we wouldn't want to do that, would we?

CALVIN

Excuse you. Let me remind you, you're in my house now. I'm not some presumed suspect on the street

Fort Wayne

youtheatre

Fort Wayne

youtheatre

Fort Wayne

youtheatre

Fort Wayne

youtheatre

Fort Wayne

youtheatre

Fort Wayne

youtheatre

Fort Wayne
youtheatre

Manny's turn to glare.

MANNY

No one said... Look, I'm trying here. I get it.
When you wear blue, you got hate and distrust
coming at you from every corner...

CALVIN

Yes, but you hang up that blue at the end of the
day. Try doing that with black skin.

MANNY

Yeah, yeah, Black lives matter. I get it....

CALVIN

And it shouldn't be only after they're dead or
after one of your brethren gets a little trigger
happy. I hope you get that!

MANNY

Yeah, I get it. I get that your people have a
heap more problems than us cops.

CALVIN

Yeah, but you all are at the top of that heap...

Fort Wayne
youtheatre



Fort Wayne
youtheatre



Fort Wayne
youtheatre



Fort Wayne
youtheatre



MANNY

I don't know why I even try. All night long, I've been dealing with this and frankly, I'm sick of it. We risk our lives every day, every single day and all we get back is hate and more hate and more hate from the very people we're trying to help.

CALVIN

And who's fault is that?

An upset Josh barrels down the stairs.

JOSH

That's not true. Why would you say that?

BELLA

What are you doing up?

JOSH

My dad, Officer Manny, doesn't hate anybody. If he did then I might, too, because Dad didn't you say that the apple doesn't fall too far from the tree?

CALVIN

Well, yes but I didn't mean....

MANNY

Josh, your dad and I both care about you. I would do anything to keep you and Emma safe.

JOSH

And keeping Malcolm safe, too? Right? You brought him home so he could be safe?

MANNY

Yeah.

BELLA

Let's go Josh.

Josh does a new special handshake with Manny, one he just invented. Manny laughs.

MANNY

Well, that's a new one. I'll have to practice.

JOSH

Yeah I made it up just for you.

Manny affectionately knuckles Josh's head.

BELLA

Now Josh.

Josh follows his mother up the stairs.

MANNY

You got a special boy there.

CALVIN

I know. And I'm trying to keep him that way.

Josh turns back to see Calvin extend his hand for a handshake with Manny.

CALVIN (CONT'D)

I do appreciate you bringing my son home. I know you could have made another choice.

Josh disappears.

CALVIN (CONT'D)

...and can you please give me a ride so I can pick up my car wherever that knucklehead left it.

A small bemused smile escapes between them.

MANNY

I can do that. You find out where while I take a minute to go tuck in my niece. I'll meet you at my cruiser.

MANNY

(To Bella)

Thanks for the coffee, mam.

BELLA

Bella...Please call me Bella.

Manny exits. Bella finally lets loose with sobs of relief. Calvin goes to comfort her.

MEANWHILE UPSTAIRS

Malcolm appears at his computer or phone, showered and dressed for bed. Hetypes.

MALCOLM

“It was a long night. Almost got arrested for doing nothing.

(stops, thinks)

But I’m home. Could’ve been in jail...split second decision. Hashtag #it’s complicated.

And we see in

THE HARTLEY HOUSE

Manny is about to enter Emma’s bedroom when Sue emerges whispering.

SUE

She’s finally asleep. She’s been so upset. You won’t believe what she asked me? What if somebody shot Josh because they didn’t like his skin color? Can you imagine?

Manny has no good response.

SUE (CONT’D)

We come from a long line of cops, Manny. I don’t know about you but I never had to question or even answer so many questions...Have I just been oblivious...?

MANNY

No, it just hits you different when it’s close to home.

SUE

And when it affects your child. Emma’s all over the place.

MANNY

(His watch or radio beeps)

I'll just peek in on her, then I better get back out there.

He tiptoes over to Emma's bed. Emma doesn't stir. He adjusts her blanket, pats her, then is about to tiptoe out when...

EMMA

Uncle Manny...

MANNY

Yes baby? I thought you were asleep.

EMMA

Please don't come tomorrow. For career day. Maybe when people start liking cops again, you can come then.

MANNY

I thought you were proud that I was a cop.

EMMA

I used to be...I mean I...

MANNY

It's ok, honey. If you don't want me there, I understand. Uncle Manny would never want to embarrass you. I'll check on you tomorrow.

Manny exits, doing his best to hide his hurt.

As morning rises on

SCENE 9 - FRIDAY MORNING

We see Bella typing, sunlight hitting her face.

BELLA

“I’m so grateful; my son could’ve been a victim last night or God forbid, processed into the correctional system.

...Instead, he was escorted home by a good man...

(Still typing)

A man who wore the badge but showed the heart underneath.”

She stops to think. Meanwhile in

SUE’S YARD

We see Manny approaching. Perhaps Emma looks out and sees him. When he looks toward the house, she hurriedly ducks so she’s left unseen. But Manny does see her and registers his hurt. Clearly she feels awful. Sue comes up behind her.

SUE

Why don’t you go out and talk to your uncle?

EMMA

No, I can’t. I don’t even want to go to school today. I don’t ever want to go to school again!

Emma storms off.

SUE

Emma. Emma.

Sue shakes her head - then goes to find her.

OUTSIDE PERKINS HOUSE

Josh appears with a bag of garbage to empty into the outside can. He greets Manny who is turning away from the house.

JOSH

(Waving)

Hi Officer Manny.

MANNY

Hey partner. Thought I'd check in on Emma this morning but...

They meet up between the yards.

MANNY (CONT'D)

I don't think Emma's having a good morning.

JOSH

Yeah, she usually doesn't. You know because of school. She gets sad a lot at school.

MANNY

She does? Really? Josh can you keep a secret just between us?

JOSH

I guess so but I'm not...not the best secret keeper.

MANNY

Think Emma's been more upset than I realized. So keep a good watch out for her today, ok? And I'm going to do us all a favor and skip career day...

JOSH

But that's all Emma's been talking about...You have to come...

MANNY

I think Josh, me being there adds too much extra pressure.

Calvin enters - his usual morning fluster of looking for things and assembling his briefcase, glances out the window.

CALVIN

Josh is out there talking to that cop.

BELLA

Manny. His name is Manny.

JOSH

But you can't give in to pressure, Officer Manny. No matter who it is. That's what my mom says. People need to see good cops like you. Even my Dad said so.

CALVIN

I'm still not sure about him.

JOSH

You saved my brother. But can I ask you something? If there was a really bad cop, and you knew about it, would you tell on him so he couldn't hurt anybody else?

Manny's police radio goes off.

MANNY

Gotta go. We 'll continue this later.

JOSH

Please come today, Officer Manny. Emma's counting on it.

Manny doesn't answer.

JOSH (CONT'D)

I'm counting on it.

Manny exits to squad car. Josh exits to put trash in can.

BELLA

(Looking out)

You always say we can learn a lot from kids. Well, take a good look at your son out there.

CALVIN

Yeah, but that man killed was somebody's son too.

Calvin exits. Bella continues to reflect.

SCENE 10 - SCHOOL

Bell rings. The kids are at their desks while Ms. Garcia introduces a new kid, a kid who mostly looks down, clearly petrified.

MS. GARCIA

This is Omar and he's from a country very far away. Anything you'd like to say Omar?

OMAR

Learning English. Not so good. Yes, hello.

The kids buzz.

KIDS

What did he say? I can't understand him.

LING

He's dressed kinda funny, too.

MS. GARCIA

Let's make Omar feel welcome everybody.

Bell rings. Omar looks terrified by the sound and by the sudden burst of activity.

KIDS

RECESS!

MS. GARCIA

It's okay, Omar. Everyone gets to go outside and play. Everybody line up and partner. Omar, you can lead the line with me.

It's awkward as Emma and Josh tentatively look at the other, deciding whether to make up but then Daniel shoves his way past Emma to partner with Josh. Josh, torn, avoids Emma's gaze.

Ling and Sophia partner. Emma left without a partner.

OUTSIDE

Fort Wayne youththeatre *The kids team up for soccer. Omar stands to the side looking even more out of sorts.*

JOSH

Maybe we should have the new kid play. Omar?

DANIEL

No, you can look at him and tell he doesn't know how to play.

SOPHIA

Yeah, how's he even going to understand? He doesn't even speak English.

EMMA

(Mutters)

Do you need to speak English to kick a ball?

LING

Emma's right.

EMMA

I am?

LING

Yeah, not every one in my family speaks English well and I hate it when people make fun of them for that.

JOSH

Anyway, we can teach him English. No big deal. Omar... Omar, you're on our team.

DANIEL

(Getting in Josh's face)

I said we don't need him.

JOSH

But...

DANIEL

And what I say goes.

Josh starts to stammer, backtrack.

Fort Wayne
youth theatre

JOSH

But...but...

DANIEL

Now I always pick the teams and I say he doesn't belong. And if you keep it up, Josh, you won't get to play either. So, Sophia, you're on my team...

JOSH

(Takes a courage breath, then)

Step off Daniel!

DANIEL

What did you say? I know I didn't hear what I thought I heard.

JOSH

You did. I said step off.

DANIEL

What the heck are you trying to prove, Josh? Yesterday you were on our side.

JOSH

But today I'm...I'm on everybody's side. And I don't care what you say, you're not going to pressure me to be on the wrong side.

EMMA

Yeah, and you're acting prejudice. You need to set a new pattern.

DANIEL

Shut up Emma.

EMMA

See that's your pattern Daniel. Being mean when somebody doesn't agree with you. You like to scare people but I'm not scared of you anymore.

Fort Wayne
youth theatre

Fort Wayne
youth theatre

DANIEL

You're crazy. Absolute psycho.

JOSH

No, she's not. Emma is very smart.

Emma looks over at Josh - did he just defend her? Josh still can't quite meet her gaze.

SOPHIA

Daniel, give it up. Emma called it right.

Emma looks at Sophia, surprised.

SOPHIA (CONT'D)

It's hard being new. I remember when I was new and nobody liked me...

LING

We still don't.

SOPHIA

You made fun of me, saying my hair beads made too much noise and that my hair stunk 'cause I had grease in it.

LING

I don't even remember that.

SOPHIA

Well, I do. I used to cry every morning wishing I could go to a different school. I hated it here.

EMMA

Yeah, but that's our old pattern. If we just give each other a chance we could...

JOSH

(Pointedly to Emma)

We could become friends. Best friends.

Emma looks surprised, then relieved.

EMMA

Yeah me and Josh are really different. But look at us, we're the bestest friends.

(Sings loud and off key)

“NOTHING THE MATTER WITH A NEW PATTERN...”

ALL

Don't sing Emma!

Suddenly Omar kicks the ball perfectly, clearly he knows soccer and it lands right at Uncle Manny's feet.

The kids are impressed by the kick.

KIDS/MANNY

Wow...

EMMA

He didn't need any English to kick that.

MANNY

Hey, hey, hey.

EMMA

(Screeching with pleasure)

Uncle Manny! You came...You came...

MANNY

How's my favorite niece?

EMMA

(Grins)

I'm your only niece. I'm so sorry Uncle Manny about...

MANNY

It's okay honey. This thing has brought out the best and worst in everybody. But you have a certain good friend who made sure I was going to be here.

He winks at Josh.

EMMA

Josh? He did? How?

JOSH

Emma, you don't have to know every single thing. Some things are just between good men...

MANNY

(laughs)

That's right, partner. Hey everyone. I'm Emma's uncle. Call me Manny or like my friend Josh here, Officer Manny.

(To Josh)

Lay one on me my man.

Josh and Uncle Manny do their special handshake

MANNY (CONT'D)

What's wrong with the rest of ya'll? Cat got your tongues.

Giggles from the kids, not sure what to make of Manny

MANNY (CONT'D)

I pulled an all nighter and I'm tired as heck so I need you all to keep me awake 'cause you don't want to hear me catch a snooze standing up.

He demonstrates snoring rather loudly. The kids giggle. He's a hoot.

SOPHIA

I like your uniform. Impressive ironing. Creases on point, very straight.

(the kids stare at her)

My mother is a seamstress. I know these things.

MANNY

Hmm, well now...thank you. You gotta good eye. Bet you're smart, too.

Sophia grins with appreciation.

Bell rings, signaling time to go in.

JOSH

It's ok, Omar.

Daniel signals to Omar it's okay to follow, Omar hesitates. Daniel thawing but still a bit begrudging.

DANIEL

Dang, you don't have to be so scared of us. We don't bite.

SOPHIA

Yeah we got you.

Ling and Sophia each take one of Omar's hands, escort him inside. Ms. Garcia gestures for Manny to walk in with her.

MS. GARCIA

Really glad you could make it. The children have so looked forward to your visit.

Everyone disappears, Emma and Josh take a minute.

JOSH

That was kinda scary. Did you hear me tell Daniel to step off? I thought he was going to deck me.

EMMA

Yeah, but you stood up to him anyway. I was like proud of you Josh.

JOSH

Well you spoke up, too.

EMMA

Yeah, I think you and me set a new pattern. Friends who speak up for what's right and for each other.

As they cross inside...

JOSH

I wonder if my dad would mind if I became a cop one day, like your uncle.

EMMA

Well, I know my Uncle Manny would say pick your poison.

JOSH

I think I finally understand what that means.

EMMA

Really? I'm glad you do 'cause I surely don't.

They laugh as they run to catch up with the others.

THE END

