

PERDIDO BEACH

by Paul Calandrino

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## PERDIDO BEACH

### CHARACTERS

VERNE	Divorced mom of two, slight, 42
GABE	Her son, a big, ungainly boy, 17
BRIANA	Her daughter, petite, kinetic, 14
NETTIE	Verne's best friend, full-bodied, strong, 37
BARRY	Aquarium patron from Iowa City, diminutive, 45
MOE	His partner originally from Texas, big and tall, 32
DOCENT	Male or female docent of any age

### SETTING

The Monterey Bay Aquarium, California

### TIME

Present

## AUTHOR'S NOTES

The set should attempt to recreate the other-worldliness of the aquarium interior. The halls are dark and humid, filled intermittently with a New Age ambient music.\* There is a sense of claustrophobia. Pools of watery light represent portals into the exhibits. When the characters look into the exhibits, they look out at the house. Benches and informational plaques can be placed before some of the portals. Only two areas should be fully lit, the aquarium entrance and the patio above the outdoor tide pool, the latter drenched in stark sunlight.

Two life-sized replicas of orcas hang from the ceiling. These can be real or projected or imagined. A combination of large and small screens depicting sea life can be used to depict the constant motion and variety of life in the exhibits. There is a catwalk where the Docent strolls most of the time with steps down to the main floor.

\* See Douglas Morton's "[Music of the Monterey Bay Aquarium](#)," recordings by John Huling, or "[The Sounds of Monterey Bay](#)" from Orange Tree Productions.

## ANNOTATIONS

... indicates dialogue that trails off.

— indicates dialogue that is cut off.

// indicates overlapping dialogue.

Dialogue in parentheses is not spoken, but indicates an expression or gesture.

SCENE 1

*A watery blue light rises on two life-sized replicas of orcas, a mother and her calf, suspended from the rafters of the Monterey Bay Aquarium. Moody, aquatic music fills the space, and we hear the cry of an orca in distress.*

*The DOCENT, dressed in a snappy windbreaker bearing the aquarium's logo, paces a backlit catwalk above the main aquarium floor. He wears a wireless mic hooked up to the aquarium PA.*

*Lights rise on the aquarium entrance. VERNE, NETTIE, GABE, and BRIANA enter. NETTIE is telling a story. The DOCENT regards them curiously.*

NETTIE

So we're all in the warehouse back by the loading dock and Josh, who I thought was a good guy but turns out is an asshole—

VERNE

I never worked with him, did I?

NETTIE

Started after you left. So he pulls up his sleeve and flexes his bicep. And the guy has these real guns on him. He says, "Feel it." And I do. Then he says, "Your turn." So I pull up my sleeve and flex, and he grabs my right tit and says, "Yeah, that's real firm."

BRIANA

What? No way!

GABE

Fuckwad.

BRIANA

What did you do?

NETTIE

What do you think! I let him have it.

VERNE

That's our Nettie.

BRIANA

You hit him?

NETTIE

In the eye. Shit hurt. You think an eye is gonna be soft ...

GABE

But the bones around it—

NETTIE

Are hard, right?

GABE

Yeah, why do we always go for the eyes? Better off going for the nads.

NETTIE

Good point.

GABE

You blind a guy in one eye, he can still rip your lungs out. Kick him in the nuts, he goes blind anyway and you can play basketball with his head.

BRIANA

Like you would know.

GABE

Oh, I know.

VERNE

Guys, come on. We're here. Let's focus.

*They look around for the first time, notice the orcas in the air.*

BRIANA

Wow! Orcas!

GABE

Guy's a queer.

VERNE

Gabe.

NETTIE

How do you figure? He grabbed my tit.

GABE

Guy doesn't have to do that if he's confident about his manhood.

NETTIE

Manhood. Listen to you!

GABE

Who'd want to touch your tits anyway?

NETTIE

Plenty of people, bub!

*She grabs him in a headlock and plunges his face into her chest.*

GABE

Ow! No! Let me go! Let me—

VERNE

Come on guys. We're here to see the fish.

*NETTIE releases GABE.*

BRIANA

They fire him?

NETTIE

Manager says assault cancels out harassment.

GABE

Dildo.

VERNE

Gabe, cut it out.

GABE

What?

VERNE

Just stop it.

GABE

Guy gropes Aunt Nettie—

DOCENT

*(intolerably upbeat, addressing us more than them)*

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to the Monterey Bay Aquarium! In just a few minutes we'll begin feeding the sea otters so now would be a wonderful time to mosey over to the sea otter exhibit. We hope you have a great visit!

BRIANA

Oh, my god! They're feeding the otters!

GABE

*(mocking)*

Ooh, the otters! The otters!

I love the otters.

NETTIE

Come on! We can't miss it!

BRIANA

I'll just die if I miss the sea otters!

GABE

Shut up! You know you want to see them.

BRIANA

*GABE removes his jacket and holds it out to VERNE.*

Can you hold this?

GABE

Why me?

VERNE

I'm hot.

GABE

You can carry it.

VERNE

Me?

GABE

You're not a little kid anymore. You're seventeen.

VERNE

Well, but I just lost two years of my life. So essentially, I'm still fifteen.

GABE

I'll take it.

NETTIE

No, he can take it back to the car.

VERNE

Aw, come on—

GABE

No, give him the keys, Nettie.

VERNE

BRIANA

*(reading from an aquarium brochure)*

We can rent lockers. Cost a dollar.

GABE

*(to VERNE)*

Dollar?

VERNE

You can take it back to the car.

NETTIE

*(handing him a dollar and her jacket)*

Put mine in there too.

*Everybody hands him stuff to put in the locker.*

GABE

See, Verne, you can't win.

VERNE

You're calling me Verne, now? I thought you were a kid.

GABE

*Mommy.*

BRIANA

Lockers are over here. Hurry! See you guys at the otter tank.

*BRIANA leads GABE offstage.*

VERNE

I don't know which is more disturbing, him calling me Verne or mommy.

NETTIE

You okay?

VERNE

Fine

NETTIE

Really?

VERNE

Shut up. I'm fine.

NETTIE

It's Gabe, right?



VERNE

Spawn of evil, yes. He's getting a little on my nerves.

NETTIE

Takes more than two weeks, huh? And don't call him that.

VERNE

Why not?

NETTIE

It's self-fulfilling.

VERNE

No, it's already fulfilled—

NETTIE

That's not funny. You gotta give him a chance. How's it going to work if you keep thinking he's ... I don't know ... he *is* just a kid.

VERNE

Yeah, *my* kid.

NETTIE

Boys mature slower.

VERNE

He's like this big, many-pimpled boy-beast.

NETTIE

Nice.

VERNE

I think he's regressed, these two years. You'd think he'd be a little more aware.

NETTIE

Of ...?

VERNE

Well, you, for one thing. Why is he using that language around you?

NETTIE

What, queer? I don't care about that.

VERNE

The way he uses it?

NETTIE

Maybe he doesn't even know.

VERNE

A many-pimpled moron.

NETTIE

Calm down, okay? You're speeding. You're joking, right?

VERNE

How would you feel if you had a son like Gabe?

NETTIE

*(a little offended)*

Uh ... I kind of do.

VERNE

Yeah, okay, right. Sort of. Thank you. Really, you've been a big help. But I'm saying ... think what it would be like if you'd given birth to it.

NETTIE

Him.

VERNE

Why didn't prison change him?

NETTIE

*(correcting her)*

Juvenile Justice.

VERNE

Isn't that what punishment is for, to make you change? Think about your crimes and repent?

NETTIE

It doesn't happen all at once. All the times you visited him, did you think he was changing radically?

VERNE

No.

NETTIE

So it takes time. Trust me. Gabe's a good kid. He's got a good heart.

VERNE

I'm not sure what you're basing that on. What data are you using?

NETTIE

He's your son.

VERNE

My son. Did you hear what my son said? On the way here?

NETTIE

What do you mean?

VERNE

What happened this morning?

NETTIE

I picked you guys up. We stopped at McDonalds. Drove here.

VERNE

What did we pass?

NETTIE

Artichoke fields? Brussels sprouts. Power plant.

VERNE

Nettie.

NETTIE

I know. The beach.

VERNE

Didn't even occur to me when we made this plan.

NETTIE

No?

VERNE

I was so focused on Gabe being back, I just didn't think about it.

NETTIE

I did.

VERNE

Why didn't you say anything?

NETTIE

Did I need to?

VERNE

Okay, yeah. I'm a moron too. He comes by it naturally. But it really didn't hit me until I saw the fucking sign. Perdido Beach. Fuck! I just seized up. My guts turned to ice.

NETTIE

I felt it. Why I turned on the heater.

VERNE

So I look at Gabe riding shotgun next to you, and I thought, God, how are we gonna get through this? What's he gonna say?

NETTIE

We got through it.

VERNE

Didn't faze him. Like it didn't exist. Like Perdido Beach was just another landmark, a stretch of sand where nothing out of the ordinary ever happened. And what does he say? He turns to me and says, "You gonna eat our hash browns?" *Hash browns*, Nettie! That's what he's thinking about.

NETTIE

Look, we came here to enjoy the day. To celebrate him being home. He probably didn't—

VERNE

I can't believe he's my own son. I feel like Grendel.

NETTIE

Who?

VERNE

Or no, Grendel's mom. *He's* Grendel.

NETTIE

I don't know what you mean.

VERNE

Let's do this quick, okay? Make the rounds and go home. Is there some way we can avoid driving past that fucking beach on the way back?

NETTIE

I'm here, Verne. I'll help you through this. If you'd give me a chance.

*This changes the conversation.*

VERNE

You've already helped ... like, way too much ...

NETTIE

Verne ... *(beat)* We're family, aren't we? As much of a family as *I've* ever had. Right? So I want to help.

I know, but ... VERNE

I can move in. NETTIE

Nettie— VERNE

I'd be there every day. NETTIE

You're there every day anyway. VERNE

You know how Gabe and I get along. Stability. NETTIE

I know. VERNE

I can referee. I'm a better cook than you are. I'm handy around the house, take out the garbage ... *and* I can service the mistress ... NETTIE

I just don't think— VERNE

Or not. It's fine. I'm fine either way. NETTIE

Right. VERNE

Really. I can live with that. And I can help with Gabe. NETTIE

I swear, if he doesn't shape up. VERNE

What? NETTIE

That's all I'm saying. If he doesn't shape up. VERNE

*A tense silence.*

*Lights rise on GABE and BRIANA at the otter exhibit, BRIANA practically bouncing with excitement. The DOCENT descends part way down the stairs.*

DOCENT

Good morning once again, ladies and gentlemen. We'll start feeding these kinetic little creatures in just a few minutes.

NETTIE

Guess we "otter" go.

VERNE

I don't know who's more kinetic, the otters or Briana.

*VERNE and NETTIE cross to the otter exhibit.*

*BARRY enters the aquarium talking on a cell phone. He is colorful, perhaps wearing a pastel plaid shirt and pastel pants with white shoes.*

BARRY

Mom, we're here! We're finally here! Oh, my God, you should see this. Life-sized replicas of killer whales hanging from the ceiling. I can see the tanks! The water is beautiful. The light, the colors. It's fabulous! I'll send photos. You can't, he's parking the car. Yes, I'll send him your love. Mom ... Mom, listen. I think I'm going to ask him. I'm going to pop the question. Yes, here! I've decided the time is right. All the signs are right. Our jobs, our relationship is great, we're here in beautiful .... Huh? Yes, and it's legal. What? Why shouldn't I pop the question? What does that mean? I'm not the "girl," Mom. I can't begin to tell you how wrong that is. I am *not* the girl! We're both boys. Men! I can pop the question. No, Mom, there isn't always one ... No, it's not up to Moe.

*MOE enters. He's a half foot taller than BARRY, well-built and rugged. He does look like the "man" of the two.*

MOE

Your mom?

BARRY

Mom, I gotta go. No, I will. I will.

MOE

Give her my love.

BARRY

He sends his love, too. He's here now. *No*, we gotta go. Love you. Mm-hmm. Love you, too. Yeah. Bye. (*disconnects*) Aaahhh!

MOE

*(about the orcas)*

Look at that.

BARRY

I know! Aren't they awesome?

MOE

They're watching over us. Like deities.

BARRY

Yeah, Mother Mary orca and little Baby Jesus orca.

MOE

You know, orcas also stay with their mothers their entire lives.

BARRY

Oh, ha ha. I get it.

MOE

Just a fact.

BARRY

I happen to have a very good relationship with my mother. I'm proud of that.

MOE

Never moved away.

BARRY

I don't live with her.

MOE

*(back to the orcas)*

Each pod of orcas has its own culture, its own language.

BARRY

Is that right? How do you know so much about killer whales?

MOE

National Geographic.

BARRY

Oh. I thought you were going to tell me how you were shipwrecked and learned the ways of the orcas while drifting the Pacific on a raft.

MOE

I learned more about sharks on that occasion.

BARRY

How about mates? Do orcas mate for life?

MOE

No, they don't. Not much is known about their mating habits, but one theory is that males only seek mates who speak a different dialect ... to avoid inbreeding.

BARRY

You and I speak different languages.

MOE

Most of the time.

*BARRY touches MOE's forearm, MOE pulls gently away.*

BARRY

Come on, we're in California. Everybody's open here.

MOE

Open or not, nobody wants to see that.

DOCENT

Alright, ladies and gentlemen! It's time to feed these hungry little *Carnivora*!

BARRY

Oh, the otters! (*consulting his brochure*) Over there!

*He leads MOE to the otter exhibit, where they join the others. The DOCENT wanders to the otter tank, invisible to the others. As the DOCENT speaks, the characters watch the otters, their faces following the zigzag motion of the animals at play.*

DOCENT

We'd like to make sure that everyone has a clear view, so please turn around and make sure that no one shorter than you is standing behind you. Specifically, small kids, folks in wheelchairs, and the like. If you're here as part of a couple, let your shorter, better half on up to the front, and you taller, larger bodied mammals can stand in the back.

*BRIANA burrows her way ahead of GABE, who tries to keep her back. MOE gallantly offers BARRY a spot in front of him. NETTIE stands close to GABE and BRIANA while VERNE hangs back upstage.*

DOCENT (cont'd)

Alright, so let me introduce you to the stars of the show, our six otters. And let me remind you folks, these are all rescue otters, otters who were abandoned or lost to their moms, or were injured in some way, and brought here to the aquarium to live happy and safe lives. Up here on the deck right now with our three trainers is Briana, our youngest otter. She's always first in line for feeding and is our friskiest animal.

*GABE deliberately blocks BRIANA's view. She wrestles her way in front of him. He tickles her and she reacts extravagantly.*



DOCENT (cont'd)

She never sleeps, folks. Seriously, we've never seen her at rest, which annoys some of her friends here in the exhibit, especially the other youngster, Gabe, who's joined her up here on the deck. Gabe is the one who always sticks his tongue out, so if you see an otter with his tongue sticking out, that's Gabe.

*GABE sticks his tongue out at BRIANA and she slugs him.*

DOCENT (cont'd)

Over in the corner is our oldest otter on exhibit, Verne, short for *La-verne*. She's also the slightest of our otters.

*NETTIE notices VERNE hanging back and goes to her.*

DOCENT (cont'd)

She's a dainty eater and stays away from the others. Except her best friend for life, Nettie, our largest female, who follows Verne wherever she goes and keeps the other otters at flipper's length away. Our last two otters are now up on the deck, best buddies Barry, the small, feisty, blond on chocolate otter who despite his diminutive size takes no guff from the others, and his much larger compatriot, Moe, who's our biggest bruiser, weighing in at a whopping sixty-five pounds.

*MOE rests his chin on top of BARRY's head. BARRY playfully digs his elbow into MOE's ribs. GABE notices the interaction.*

DOCENT (cont'd)

Don't let that size fool you, though, folks, he's as gentle as an ocean sunfish, and wouldn't hurt a minnow.

GABE

*(to BRIANA, about BARRY and MOE)*

Look.

BRIANA

Huh?

GABE

Those guys.

BRIANA

So?

GABE

Gah. Right here in public.

BRIANA

Shut up.

*BARRY and MOE realize they're being watched and MOE separates from BARRY, who returns GABE's stare.*

MOE

*(quietly to BARRY)*

Hey, come on now, Shrimpy. Be nice. I'll buy you an ice cream.

BARRY

I'm not fond of that nickname.

MOE

Shrimpy. Come on. Ice cream.

*They move farther away from the others.*

DOCENT

So what you're watching right now is called positive reinforcement, right? Our trainers ask our otters to perform certain behaviors, and once they do, we give them a "good job" and feed them some clams and squid and shrimp to reinforce the behavior.

BRIANA

*(to GABE)*

Just don't worry about it. You're supposed to be paying attention to your family. To me!

GABE

Yeah? What's that gonna get me?

BRIANA

Happiness!

GABE

Pfff.

DOCENT

So for you kids in the audience, this is a very effective way to train your parents. Find out what your parents' favorite food is and make sure you always have a tin of that food strapped to your hip. And if they let you stay up a little later, give them a "good job" and a little food to reinforce the behavior.

BRIANA

What's your favorite food, Mom?

VERNE

I don't like food. Sorry, you're out of luck.

DOCENT

This sort of training works just as effectively with spouses, unless they're hearing this right now, and then they'll know what you're up to.

BARRY

Hear that? I know what you're up to.

MOE

I merely offered you some ice cream. To prevent you from going off on some innocent kid.

BARRY

Innocent. Right. Staring like that.

MOE

Leave him alone. Let's go.

BARRY

You're buying me that ice cream.

*BARRY and MOE exit.*

BRIANA

*(consulting her brochure)*

Let's go that way! We'll take a left at the octopus, pass through Monterey Bay Habitats, and wind up at the Kelp Forest!

GABE

Who put you in charge?

BRIANA

Come on, Mom, Aunt Nettie.

VERNE

Go ahead. We'll keep up.

*They all exit, BRIANA in the lead. The DOCENT ascends to the catwalk.*

SCENE 2

*Lights up on a row of exhibits. BARRY and MOE walk slowly on, looking into tanks as they stroll.*

BARRY

It's inexcusable. In this day and age? I'm sorry, it's just impermissible.

MOE

It was a look. A glance. He was glancing at us.

A glance can say everything.

BARRY

You can read minds?

MOE

I don't have to read minds. I can tell you exactly what he was thinking.

BARRY

What?

MOE

He really needs to be // taught a lesson ...

BARRY

Let it go.

MOE

Pisses me off. (*They stop in front of a large portal.*) What's that? The fish with the white chin and underbite.

BARRY

California sheephead. Interesting fact: They all start life as females and then almost all become males.

MOE  
(*reading a plaque*)

Really?

BARRY

What it says.

MOE

It's like us. I mean, humans.

BARRY

How so?

MOE

Embryos, we all start out as females.

BARRY

I've heard that. It's true?

MOE

Debatable, but true enough. Somewhere in utero some of us become males.

BARRY

MOE

Says sheephead live two-thirds of their lives as females, then switch.

BARRY

Wow, sex change without the operation. Do they mate for life?

MOE

What is this obsession you have with mating for life?

BARRY

Just curious about it.

MOE

Why? You the mating for life type?

BARRY

I think having a spouse would be nice.

MOE

Oh, you do?

BARRY

Don't you?

MOE

I'm not convinced. No offense.

BARRY

Have you thought about it?

MOE

Not much. Some.

BARRY

What do you think?

MOE

I think it's unnatural.

BARRY

What? Lots of species form pair bonds ... for *life*.

MOE

Yeah. But pair bonding is different than marriage. (*off BARRY's look*) It is. Pair bonding is a biological imperative. It makes sense. Marriage? It's artificial. An institution.

BARRY

I'm institutional. City planner. I thrive on institution. Okay, pair bonding is fine in the wild—

MOE

We did meet at Studio 13 ...

BARRY

Right? But in the civilized world, where we organize our surroundings and codify our interactions, marriage is a way of ... it's the evolution of pair bonding into something more significant and meaningful.

MOE

No, I kinda disagree. I think marriage is the subversion of pair bonding, the taming of it. I don't think we should be afraid of our instincts, our passions.

BARRY

We should all just run wild?

MOE

Not completely. Obviously not. But making an institution of pair bonding is like ... putting these fish in a tank.

BARRY

Marriage is imprisonment, you're saying.

MOE

I guess I consider it more confining than liberating.

BARRY

So liberation is the highest value?

MOE

Look, Barry, I'm not completely against marriage. I think it's nice for some people. But most animals do fine without it.

BARRY

*(seductive)*

We're not most animals.

MOE

No, we are not.

*They want to kiss, but don't. Lights down on BARRY and MOE.*

SCENE 3

*Lights up on the octopus exhibit. GABE and BRIANA enter.*

BRIANA

Oh, my god. Oh, my god, I've never seen anything so ugly in my whole life! It's hideous!

GABE

Uh ... that's a mirror you're looking into.

BRIANA

Shut up! I've never seen a red octopus. It's huge. It's ... it's so slimy looking. Look at those eyes bulging out of its head!

GABE

I knew a guy in prison looked like that.

BRIANA

No you didn't.

GABE

Pretty much. Only he had eight penises.

BRIANA

Ewww!!! Don't say things like that around me. I'm only fourteen! And you were in juvie, not prison.

GABE

You don't think there are guys with eight penises in juvie?

BRIANA

No.

GABE

Okay.

*They watch a moment.*

BRIANA

I'm glad you're home.

GABE

Yeah, don't go all squishy on me.

BRIANA

Are you glad to be home?

GABE

I guess.

BRIANA

I mean, it's better than juvie, right?

GABE

In some ways.

BRIANA

In every way, right? (*pause*) What was it like? I mean, was it really bad?

GABE

No it was great. Like Disney World.

BRIANA

Gabe.

GABE

You don't want to know.

BRIANA

I do.

GABE

It's like this. Being in a tank. Everybody looking at you.

BRIANA

Who's looking?

GABE

The guards, your parents ... you. What's that big one over there?

BRIANA

Tuna.

GABE

Really? Never seen one outside the can. (*she slugs him*) No, but look at it. Look where it swims. It swims in the same circle over and over again. It doesn't even know what else to do. That's what it's like.

BRIANA

Did you make friends?

GABE

(*laughs*)

Yeah, I had *lots* of friends.

BRIANA

Don't be a jerk. Not to me.

GABE

There's something about you that makes me want to be a jerk, okay?



BRIANA

*(hurt)*

Fine

GABE

No, come on, now. I'm only joking. Okay, I'll tell you the truth.

BRIANA

If you want.

GABE

Promise not to tell anyone.

BRIANA

Okay. What?

GABE

You know what they say about being in prison, juvie, whatever? About, you know, guys doing it with each other.

BRIANA

Really?

GABE

There was a guy.

BRIANA

Oh, Gabe, I'm so sorry.

GABE

No, he was okay. He protected me.

BRIANA

What was he like?

GABE

Big guy. Black, but his name was Ramirez. Called himself Big Romeo and said he'd protect me if I'd be his Little Romeo. *(BRIANA gasps)* He wrote poems to me. Gave me tater tots off his cafeteria tray. He liked me to shove whole avocados up his ass.

BRIANA

What?

GABE

Good thing his dick was about the size of a breakfast sausage. I could fart it right out.

BRIANA

Gabe!

GABE

He made me wear an afro wig when we did it so I'd look like his mom—

BRIANA

*(pounding his chest)*

You jerk! You said you were going to tell me the truth! Why do I always fall for your lies?

GABE

*(laughing)*

Do you know how boring it is when people ask, "What was it really like?"

BRIANA

I'm your sister. I care about you. I want to know what happened, how I can help you.

GABE

I don't need help. I'll be fine. I *am* fine.

BRIANA

So you won't tell me the truth.

GABE

Briana, *(like Jack Nicholson)* you can't handle the truth.

BRIANA

Yes, I can. It can't be any worse than your lies.

GABE

Oh, yes it can.

BRIANA

I don't believe you.

GABE

The truth is worse than anything I could make up. But you know what? It's less dramatic.

BRIANA

What ... what do you mean?

GABE

The worst thing about being locked up? You can't ... describe it. You can't see it. Because it's not even really there. So ... don't ask. Okay?

*Lights down on GABE and BRIANA.*

SCENE 4

*Lights up on VERNE and NETTIE at the Kelp Forest. The DOCENT paces the catwalk above.*

NETTIE

I thought kelp was just big blobs of seaweed floating on the surface. It really is a forest, isn't it?

VERNE

Yeah, but you can't see the forest for the blobs.

DOCENT

*(annoyingly mystical)*

From a solitary shark to shimmering schools of sardines, from the spiny legged crab to the grotesque cabezone, the kelp forest is an enchanted realm.

*GABE and BRIANA enter from one side of the stage, BARRY and MOE from the other.*

DOCENT (cont'd)

Teeming with life, it's the stage upon which the victories and tragedies of life are played out on a daily basis, 24/7/365 ...

VERNE

Laying it on a little thick, aren't they?

NETTIE

It's dramatic.

BRIANA

Where were you guys? We should stick together.

VERNE

We're right here.

DOCENT

... all against the backdrop of these magnificent trees of the deep that grow an average of four to six inches a day. Which keeps our team of underwater scuba gardeners busy.

GABE

*(spotting BARRY and MOE, to BRIANA)*

Lover boys at three o'clock.

BRIANA

I told you don't pay any attention.

DOCENT

Don't be surprised to see rockfish hanging motionless, even upside down, among the kelp blades. These fish can hover without sinking or floating to the top because they have a gas-filled sac called a swim bladder that helps them stay put.

BARRY

They're like you, Moe. You have a gas-filled sac.

MOE

*(ignoring him)*

How do they tell the live floaters from the dead ones?

BARRY

*(seeing GABE)*

Bigot at six o'clock.

DOCENT

In just a few minutes our divers will enter the tank and this place will really start hopping. Get ready for a feeding frenzy.

MOE

*(putting his hand on BARRY's shoulder and pointing into the forest)*

Look, a sheephead. Looks like she might be tired of being female.

BARRY

Time to man up, sheephead.

GABE

*(to BRIANA)*

There they go again.

BRIANA

Don't stare.

GABE

*(singing a Lady Gaga tune just loud enough for BARRY to hear)*

*You know that I want you. You know that I need you.*

BRIANA

Cut it out.

*BARRY glowers at GABE.*

GABE

*Love, love, love ... I want your love.*

BARRY

Excuse me! (*all heads turn to him*) Do you have something you want to say?

GABE

(*innocently*)

What?

BARRY

(*advancing on him*)

Is there a problem?

*VERNE moves swiftly between GABE and BARRY.*

VERNE

Can I help you?

*Overlapping.*

NETTIE

Verne, what's ...?

BRIANA

Mom, it's nothing.

MOE

Barry ...

BARRY

Is this your son?

VERNE

What's the problem?

BARRY

You know, you raised a little bigot.

VERNE

I think you'd better back off.

NETTIE

Hey, guys. I don't know what you think // happened, but—

MOE

It's nothing—

BARRY

We've all got basic rights, kid.

GABE

Who says you don't? *Man.*

*GABE and BARRY take steps toward each other. Overlapping.*

VERNE	MOE	BRIANA	NETTIE	BARRY	GABE
Just leave us alone or I'll get security over here ...	Barry ... Look, folks, we don't want any ...	He was just goofing around ... he didn't mean anything ...	Hey, calm down guys. We'll talk to him.	You'd better get a clue, kid, because the world is changing.	I don't give a fuck what you think ...

NETTIE

Can we just talk about this? Tell us what happened and we'll—

VERNE

We don't need to talk about // anything with these—

BARRY

You need to teach your son to have a little // respect for—

MOE

Barry, let's go.

BARRY

—for others. No matter who. Simple respect.

GABE

Give me a break.

BARRY

No, I will not give you a break.

VERNE

Just leave us alone, okay? *(to her brood)* Let's go.

MOE

Come on, you made your point.

BARRY

Wish it was that easy.

*BARRY and MOE exit. BARRY drops his aquarium brochure without noticing.*

VERNE

What the hell happened there?

GABE

Nothing. I don't know.

VERNE

You don't know?

NETTIE  
Something happened.

GABE  
I was just singing to myself and the guy went off on me.

VERNE  
Singing? To yourself?

BRIANA  
Lady Gaga.

VERNE  
Gaga?

BRIANA  
*Love, love, love. I want your—*

GABE  
Briana.

VERNE  
You were taunting them?

GABE  
I wasn't taunting them. They had their hands all over each other.

VERNE  
So?

GABE  
We're in public.

VERNE  
And so you taunted them.

GABE  
I was just saying ... just making a joke.

VERNE  
It's not funny, Gabe.

GABE  
They're the ones grossing people out.

NETTIE  
It's not gross.

GABE

Maybe to me it is.

NETTIE

Well, it shouldn't be.

BRIANA

I think PDAs are protected under the First Amendment. Free speech.

GABE

So is singing.

NETTIE

Not yours.

VERNE

I can't believe you.

GABE

What can't you believe? That I have standards? That people groping each other in public grosses me out?

BRIANA

They weren't exactly—

VERNE

*(losing patience)*

You haven't learned a thing in two years!

GABE

Oh, great. A minute ago you were ready to bite that guy's head off. Now you're attacking me!

VERNE

Gabe, don't you see that what you're doing is exactly what got you into trouble before?

GABE

No it—

VERNE

You've got to stop this. It has to come to an end right now. You've got to start letting people be. What other people do and who they are shouldn't have any effect on you. Everybody has a right.

GABE

What about my rights!

VERNE

You don't have any rights! // You gave up your—



GABE  
You're not even listening to me.

NETTIE  
We need to calm down.

GABE  
No, you all need to calm down.

*He storms off.*

BRIANA  
Mom, it wasn't that bad. He didn't mean anything by it.

*She follows after him. VERNE and NETTIE are silent a moment.*

NETTIE  
Oh, boy. This is tough.

VERNE  
He's at it again.

NETTIE  
He's not at anything. He was a little rude. He can be a punk, okay? But this is exactly how // I could help—

VERNE  
Nettie, not now. This has nothing to do with you. I should've just let the little guy go after him. What am I coming to his defense for? That's fucked up. He has to sink or swim.

NETTIE  
You can't let him sink.

VERNE  
Apparently, I can't *stop* him from sinking. I won't let him take me down too.

*BARRY enters alone to retrieve his fallen brochure. He overhears VERNE and NETTIE and steps back into the shadows where they can't see him.*

NETTIE  
He won't. You're under a lot of stress.

VERNE  
I can't stop thinking about ... the guy.

NETTIE  
That little—?

VERNE  
No. The victim. Pierson.

NETTIE  
Oh. (*beat*) Still?

VERNE  
The closer it got to Gabe's release, the more I thought about him. I couldn't help it. Still can't. I can see his sister in court, crying. Gabe at the defense table, his skin all broken out, his hair a mess. Defiant. Not a thought passing through his head. Or maybe he thought he was justified? For killing a guy who allegedly came on to them?

NETTIE  
He didn't kill him.

VERNE  
If he'd had the gun?

NETTIE  
*No*, he wouldn't have.

VERNE  
But he didn't try to stop it.

NETTIE  
It happened too fast.

VERNE  
Too fast.

NETTIE  
He didn't know there was a gun.

VERNE  
Passing the beach today ... those photos came back ... the police photos. So vivid—

NETTIE  
You never should've looked at those.

VERNE  
Everything white. The guy's windbreaker, his jeans, shoes, the sand ... his hair.

NETTIE  
Don't think about it.

VERNE

His skin. The skin of his chest was so white. Except the bullet wounds. Three clean shots. How could they be so clean? It looked like they'd wiped off the blood, but they wouldn't do that there at the beach, would they? Of course not. *(pause)* Gabe was there. Right there when it happened. And he didn't do a thing.

*BARRY has heard enough and storms off.*

VERNE (cont'd)

He needs to go live with his father.

NETTIE

What?

VERNE

I should've sent him a long time ago. A boy is better off with his dad.

NETTIE

Not necessarily.

VERNE

Rick can show him how to be "a man." I can't do that.

NETTIE

Rick's got his own family. He'd never take Gabe. He can't give him the support he needs. I know about this, from foster care.

VERNE

It's not foster care.

NETTIE

Gabe needs you now more than ever. He needs you to understand him. And he needs a mom.

VERNE

I don't know.

NETTIE

What don't you know?

VERNE

I don't want to understand him.

NETTIE

You're his mom.

VERNE

Which is fucked up. He doesn't need me anymore. He doesn't *want* me.

NETTIE

Love doesn't just evaporate.

VERNE

Haven't you heard? There's a drought in California.

NETTIE

I know you ... maybe better than you know yourself. You don't mean that.

*They watch the fish for a while.*

VERNE

We'll see.

*VERNE wanders off. NETTIE looks into the Kelp Forest, then follows.*

SCENE 5

*Lights crossfade to a small exhibit depicting the polluted ocean floor. GABE enters followed by BRIANA.*

BRIANA

Gabe, wait up.

GABE

Man, Mom has just totally lost her shit. She's off the deep end.

BRIANA

It's hard having you back. She has to adjust.

GABE

*She has to adjust? She's the adult. She's supposed to be taking care of me. But all she can do is correct everything I do. She doesn't even know anything about me.*

BRIANA

It's not like you're all willing to open up to her.

GABE

Still. She just assumes ... *(looking at the exhibit)* What's this?

BRIANA

*(reading the plaque)*

Polluted Ocean Floor.

GABE

They make an exhibit out of that? Boots, plastic milk cartons, used rubbers?

BRIANA

There are no rubbers. They're trying to make a point.

GABE

Like what, garbage is ugly?

BRIANA

That we need to save the ocean habitat.

GABE

Or that fish can live just fine in garbage.

BRIANA

They seem to be.

GABE

What's that one called. It's sick. Looks like it's *made* of garbage. Is that shit hanging from its face part of it?

BRIANA

It's called a ... (*reading*) Sarcastic Fringehead.

GABE

What?

BRIANA

Sarcastic Fringehead.

GABE

The name of the fish?

BRIANA

Yeah.

GABE

That's insane. (*they both laugh, he taps on the glass*) Hey, bro, you're not alone. I wonder what faggot came up with that name.

BRIANA

Gabe.

GABE

What?

BRIANA

You gotta stop saying stuff like that.

GABE  
Oh, not you, too, Mommy Jr.

BRIANA  
You know, you hurt people when you talk like that.

GABE  
That's their problem.

BRIANA  
You don't care about Aunt Nettie?

GABE  
What do you mean?

BRIANA  
You know she's in love with Mom, right?

GABE  
What? She loves all of us. She's our aunt.

BRIANA  
Not our real aunt. She's in love with Mom. Like, she wants to be her partner.

GABE  
No way.

BRIANA  
Way.

GABE  
Mom's a lesbian?

BRIANA  
I don't know. I don't think so. Maybe she's bi.

GABE  
Really?

BRIANA  
You really didn't know? So you shouldn't use gay as an insult or criticize gays.

GABE  
Freaky. Had no idea.

BRIANA  
It's because all you think about is you.

GABE

Maybe. But I don't care about gays. (*off her look*) I don't. Anybody can fuck whoever they want. None of my business.

BRIANA

You really think that?

GABE

Gah, of course. But I defend my god given right to trash anybody I want to. People are ridiculous. People are hypocrites. They think they're big shit, like that midget back there.

BRIANA

Not a midget.

GABE

Guy's an asshole. Listen, the worst way people act is the way they really are. People suck. They'll tell you they care. They'll run around like they're all holy and such good friends with you, but they're hypocrites. And I refuse to play along.

BRIANA

I think you're wrong. I think people are basically good and they do bad things because they're hurt, because bad things were done to them.

GABE

That's fine. See? I don't care what you think. You can think whatever you want. But if you say that shit around me, prepare to be trashed.

BRIANA

I think Mom is good.

GABE

Aww, that's sweet.

BRIANA

I think she loves us and would do anything for us. She stood up for you.

GABE

She didn't need to stand up for me. I could've scrubbed the toilet with that guy.

BRIANA

But she did. She's no bigger than that guy—

GABE

The midget.

BRIANA

*But* her instinct was to protect you. That's not selfish.

GABE

Right, instinct. Instinct is different. You don't have any control over it. But I bet right at this very instant she's kicking herself. She's thinking how stupid it was to defend me.

BRIANA

Uh-uh. You're wrong. Nettie, too. She had a hard life. Bad things happened to her, but she's not selfish. People are basically good.

GABE

Gee, Briana, good luck with that. I hope you can hold onto that philosophy after your first date rape.

BRIANA

Gabe! Gross!

GABE

*(pointing at the exhibit)*

That's where we live, Briana. Right there. In all the garbage.

SCENE 6

*Lights crossfade to BARRY and MOE at the Jellies exhibit. BARRY consults his phone.*

BARRY

It made national headlines. Look, CNN. I remember it clearly.

MOE

Yeah, I remember.

BARRY

I didn't realize it happened so close to here. It's like twenty miles north of Monterey.

MOE

And you think he was one of the kids?

BARRY

The mother said it. Says here there were five teenage boys. Only names one of them, the one tried as an adult. The others were tried as juveniles.

MOE

So the guy bought them beer?

BARRY

Yeah, *they* approached *him*. He bought them the beer and they went to an isolated beach ... uh, Perdido Beach, where the kids say he came on to them.



MOE  
And they shot him for that?

BARRY  
They were in "fear for their safety."

MOE  
Five teenage boys? How old was the guy?

BARRY  
Sixty.

MOE  
Jesus. And this kid was one of them.

BARRY  
He was there. He was one of them.

MOE  
How long was he in?

BARRY  
It was just ... little over two years ago.

MOE  
Insane.

BARRY  
Only one shooter. Some of the other kids claimed not to know the oldest had a gun. But they all initially lied to the police about being involved, being present. Idiots.

MOE  
They were scared.

BARRY  
*(pocketing his phone)*  
He's out and walking around free and he's completely unrepentant and still spreading his hate. It's infuriating! I feel like going back there and really letting him have it.

MOE  
What would you say? I mean, what *could* you say that would make any difference?

BARRY  
Who knows? But something needs to be said. You can't just stand back and let these things pass.

MOE  
But it's not your battle.

BARRY

No, it *is* my battle. It's our battle. Just because the laws have changed, don't think things are different. They're not. That kid is proof. The gall, staring at us like that. Taunting us. It makes me crazy!

MOE

I know, I know. (*beat*) Barry, we're on vacation. I know the kid is bad news, and that he's not the only one, and the world needs to change. But maybe we can let this go ... for now?

BARRY

I can't let it go.

MOE

No, I mean ... not let it go, but not let it ruin our vacation. We're here to relax. Let's enjoy our time here. Let's do what we came here to do.

*Pause.*

BARRY

Okay. Okay, Moe? This is what I came to do. (*he pulls a ring box from his pocket and opens it*) Moe ... Maurice Williams, love of my life ... marry me.

MOE

What?

BARRY

Please take my hand in marriage.

MOE

You're proposing?

BARRY

It's what I came here to do.

MOE

Really? I ... I don't know what to say.

BARRY

Say yes.

MOE

You're actually proposing to me // right now.

BARRY

Yes, I am.

MOE

I ... I wasn't expecting ... You know how I feel about marriage, right?

BARRY

You don't need to think about it. You don't. You know in your heart that it's the right thing for us, for you and me. We love each other, we like each other, we're compatible, we like to do the same things. The timing is perfect. I have my promotion, you like your job, you're coming into your own as a painter. Our lives are so good. This would make it perfect.

MOE

You have to let me think about it. And we need to talk, right?

BARRY

It's our responsibility to get married.

MOE

Responsibility? How's that?

BARRY

Our duty. You're right, we can't fight every battle. This kid is just one idiot in the world and by picking a fight with him, what am I really accomplishing? Maybe nothing. But us getting married, that's sending a message to the whole world.

MOE

To Iowa City conservatives, at least. All three of them.

BARRY

Iowa City and beyond. It's an active affirmation of, of—

MOE

It's activism.

BARRY

Right. It's activism.

MOE

We'd be getting married for a cause.

BARRY

What? No. I want to marry you because I love you.

MOE

Because it sounded like you were saying I was obligated to say yes because it's my duty and responsibility to the cause.

BARRY

Okay, yes, it's that too.

MOE

How much of it is love and how much is the cause? In your mind.

BARRY

You can't separate out the two. It's a hundred percent love and a hundred percent responsibility.

MOE

Really? No, I think there's a ratio. I mean, if you really look at it.

BARRY

Who cares if it's fifty-fifty or twenty-eighty? It's just a good idea.

MOE

I might care. It might make a difference if you're fifty-five percent social responsibility. I think I'd want it tipped the other way. By a big margin.

BARRY

Moe, of course it's about love. We're in love.

MOE

Yeah, I'm clear about that.

BARRY

Good.

MOE

But I've got questions.

BARRY

I know, the "institution."

MOE

About the institution, yes. But also about the emotion.

BARRY

Huh?

MOE

You know me, Barry. I question everything. I question the emotion of love.

BARRY

Uh ...

MOE

The impulse to love is kind of dubious to me in some ways.

BARRY

You've got to be kidding.

MOE

No, listen. We're animals, right? And our emotions are traits that help us defend ourselves, feed ourselves, procreate.

BARRY

You're a nihilist.

MOE

No, I'm an animal. I like being one. I embrace my animalness.

BARRY

But you think love is what? An instinct just to get laid.

MOE

I don't know. I'm in it, and I love it. I love being in love. With you. It's wild and unpredictable. But how can we hope to harness it? Reduce it to a legal contract.

BARRY

That's not what marriage—

MOE

Wait, let me finish. Don't you think we'd be setting a much stronger example by *not* getting married? By proudly embracing the authority we have over our own lives?

BARRY

Sounds like you do.

MOE

Try to tame love and it could wither down to the size of a ... a TV screen so you can sit in your recliner every night and watch it and try to remember how alive it used to be.

BARRY

You're so much rebel.

MOE

I really think about this stuff.

*They look at the jellies a while.*

BARRY

It's not that you're afraid of commitment?

MOE

You think I'm spineless?

The thought crossed my mind.

BARRY

If I were spineless I'd have said yes.

MOE

I guess.

BARRY

Don't be hurt.

MOE

Don't be hurt? You just turned me down.

BARRY

I didn't turn you down. I said I needed to think about it.

MOE

That hurts.

BARRY

I'm sorry. I love you.

MOE

Right.

BARRY

SCENE 7

*Lights crossfade to BRIANA in front of a small exhibit with GABE standing behind her.*

BRIANA  
*(bending closer to the exhibit)*  
Aw, look at this little fella.

*GABE rolls his eyes and walks away. He exits without BRIANA noticing. The DOCENT enters, unnoticed by her. She pushes a button on the exhibit.*

DOCENT  
*(annoyingly dramatic)*  
There's a killer in this aquarium, colorful, cold, calculating ... and also a shrimp. The Peacock Mantis Shrimp isn't a peacock, or a mantis, or even an actual shrimp.

BRIANA  
What is he, then?

DOCENT

*(approaching her)*

A crustacean, in the same family as lobsters, crabs, and true shrimps, all of which make for a tasty meal for this colorful killer, known to aquarists as "the thumb splitter."

BRIANA

Ouch. Sounds painful.

DOCENT

It is painful. The Mantis Shrimp has front claws that shoot out with the same force as a .22-caliber bullet. Powerful enough to crack a lobster's shell or break thick aquarium glass.

BRIANA

Oh, no!

DOCENT

*(over her shoulder now)*

Don't worry. We house the Mantis Shrimp by itself behind super thick glass. Its limbs strike so fast and hard, it makes the water boil around them, turning it into plasma. If humans had as much strength in their arms, we'd be able to throw a baseball into orbit.

BRIANA

Oh, my god!

DOCENT

Yes. Oh, my god.

BRIANA

It's so beautiful though. So colorful. Like a mini Chinese dragon.

DOCENT

The reason for its bright coloration may have to do with its vision, which is the most extraordinary on the planet.

BRIANA

Really?

DOCENT

Mm-hmm. Humans have three types of cone cells to see all the colors of the rainbow. The Mantis Shrimp has sixteen.

BRIANA

No way!

DOCENT

Way. With their hyper-spectral vision they can see colors we can't even imagine. Infrared, ultraviolet, and a type of curling light wave that is invisible to every creature in the universe but the Mantis Shrimp.

BRIANA

So beautiful. So ... all seeing.

DOCENT

And deadly. The Mantis Shrimp is a beautiful, all-seeing, vicious killer. And it's right here in this aquarium.

BRIANA

*(an idea dawning)*

Right here in the aquarium. You hear that, Gabe? He's a shrimp, but he's a killer. Gabe? *(looks around and sees that he's gone)* Gabe? *(exits in a panic)* Gabe?

*The DOCENT strolls smugly off.*

SCENE 8

*Crossfade to the Touch Pools. NETTIE is bending over one of the pools and stretching her hand out toward a bat ray. VERNE looks on.*

NETTIE

Hey, bat ray. Come over here.

VERNE

They don't like to be touched.

NETTIE

Then why are they in the Touch Pool?

VERNE

Against their will.

NETTIE

Here bat ray, bat ray, bat ray.

VERNE

I'm calling Rick as soon as we get home.

NETTIE

He's all about the daughters. The excellent, high achieving, gorgeous, talented, plastic daughters. What's he want with a notorious son he never once visited in juvie? You think he'll welcome him into the McMansion?

*She gives up trying to pet the rays.*

VERNE

This is the advantage men have over women. They don't have feelings.



NETTIE  
Rick doesn't, that's for sure.

VERNE  
Where else could he go? Boarding school? Military academy? I know, Job Corps.

NETTIE  
You're serious?

VERNE  
Dead serious.

NETTIE  
You have more heart than that.

VERNE  
A crab has a heart, but no feelings.

NETTIE  
That's your goal?

*BRIANA enters.*

BRIANA  
Where's Gabe? I think we should leave.

NETTIE  
We've only been here an hour.

VERNE  
I'd be happy to leave.

BRIANA  
Have you seen Gabe?

VERNE  
I thought he was with you.

BRIANA  
We need to find him.

*BARRY and MOE enter.*

MOE  
Want to touch a starfish?

BARRY

No.

MOE

Anemones, look. You can put your finger in an anemone.

BARRY

No, thank you.

MOE

Look, I'm sorry I ruined your surprise. Tonight we'll have a great dinner, we'll talk, laugh, go back to the hotel. We'll work it out. I know we will.

BARRY

Glad you're so sure.

*GABE enters from the same direction as BARRY and MOE. He heads for his family.*

BRIANA

There he is.

GABE

*(passing BARRY and MOE)*

Gentlemen.

MOE

Barry.

BARRY

What did you say?

BRIANA

Come on. Let's go to—

BARRY

Hey, you! What did you say?

NETTIE

Oh, Jesus, it's those guys again.

*MOE grabs BARRY's arm but BARRY pulls away and moves toward GABE.*

BARRY

What the hell is your problem?

GABE

Huh? I'm sorry, what?

*VERNE thinks about interceding but stops herself.*

BARRY

What's that supposed to mean, "Gentlemen"!

GABE

It's an address of respect and politeness.

BARRY

Don't give me that, asshole.

NETTIE

Look, guys, we're leaving.  
Just leave it alone, okay?

BRIANA

Gabe, let's go. We're ...

GABE

Is there a law against being polite?

BARRY

Don't get smart with me.

GABE

You're losing it, dude.

BARRY

I know who you are. I know what you did. You don't want me to lose it.

MOE

Barry, cut it out.

GABE

Who do you think I am?

BARRY

A murderer!

*VERNE can't help herself. She advances on BARRY.*

VERNE

Hey! It's none of your business! You know nothing about it!

BARRY

I won't stand for this. The world won't stand for it anymore!

BRIANA

Please, mister. Leave us alone. Please?

GABE

Show me what you got, big boy.

BARRY

What? You think I want to fight?

GABE

You're spitting a lot. Looks like you want to fight.

BARRY

You're a sick mother— . I'd love punch your face in, but I don't do that kind of thing.

GABE

Oh, you're above that, huh?

BARRY

Yes, I'm above it. You're a bigot. And you know what? I'm above *you*.

GABE

Fuck you, hypocrite.

NETTIE

Buddy, you don't know what you're talking about, okay? You're way out of line. You think this kid is a homophobe? You're whacked out. Look at us. We're his mothers. His two mothers. You think he's got a thing against gays?

BARRY

*(taken aback)*

That's ... he ...

NETTIE

The kid was in the wrong place at the wrong time.

GABE

You don't need to get into it with this jerk.

NETTIE

He's a good kid. And you're way out of line. So just back off.

*A pause. VERNE exits.*

BARRY

Just stay away from us.

BRIANA

We will. You don't have to—

GABE  
You stay away from us.

BARRY  
You don't fool me, punk.

GABE  
You don't fool me.

MOE  
Are we done here? Can we go? (to NETTIE) Sorry.

BARRY  
Don't apologize to her.

MOE  
I take it back.

*BARRY exits.*

NETTIE  
Your friend needs some anger management training.

MOE  
He's okay. He's not totally off, you know. (to GABE) You ought to watch it.

GABE  
Is that a threat?

MOE  
Advice. Enjoy the rest of your visit.

*He exits. GABE exits and NETTIE follows. BRIANA is alone. She looks up at the orcas.*

BRIANA  
(as if in prayer)  
Fuck.

*She exits.*

## SCENE 9

*Lights up on the Kelp Forest. VERNE waits. NETTIE enters with GABE following. BRIANA is close behind. They all look at VERNE, who looks only at GABE.*

I don't want to hear it.

GABE

Hear what?

VERNE

I know what you're going to say.

GABE

I don't think you do.

VERNE

Let's just leave, okay? You have to think about this before you say anything. Let's go find a place to have lunch and calm down.

NETTIE

I'm calm.

VERNE

Calm as a hand grenade before it goes off.

GABE

Funny.

VERNE

Let's go.

NETTIE

We all have to get used to each other again, but it's going to be okay.

BRIANA

I disagree.

VERNE

It's not going to // be easy—

NETTIE

I need you to move out.

VERNE

What?

GABE

He just got home.

BRIANA

You can move in with your dad. You can move out on your own.

VERNE

On my own?  
GABE

I'll emancipate you.  
VERNE

Look, what do you want me to say? I'm sorry? Sorry for what? You want me to apologize to that guy? Go suck his dick or something?  
GABE

*(detonating)*  
I want you to shut up and get out of my house!  
VERNE

What did I do? That guy is fucking nuts! He's giving // me shit—  
GABE

I don't want to hear it, Gabe. You know what you did. Don't play innocent. I'm calling your dad when we get home and then you're out.  
VERNE

How come he gets to go to Dad's?  
BRIANA

You want to go, too? // By all means—  
VERNE

Verne, I wish you would think about this—  
NETTIE

I have been thinking about this! I've thought about nothing else for the past two years. I'm tired of thinking about it. I gave birth to a son who ... I don't know who or what he is. An alien. A freak. Look, Gabe, you're free. The state set you free and I'm setting you free. I don't want to look at you anymore or listen to your condescension and your pretension.  
VERNE

I don't pretend to be anything I'm not.  
GABE

And that's sad. That's scary. You are what you appear to be. It kills me to hear that! I won't let you pull this shit again.  
VERNE

I think ... we can look at the possibility of counseling. For Gabe ... for us as a family.  
NETTIE

VERNE

And you are not a member of this family! You are not my kids' second mom! There's no relationship there, Nettie. Except friends. We're just friends. How many ways do I have to say it?

BRIANA

Mom.

NETTIE

You don't mean that.

VERNE

You've been a good friend. You've helped. You've been there for me and the kids.

GABE

Way more than that dick of a father you want to send me to.

VERNE

But at the end of the day, you're not responsible for the evil he does—

GABE

Evil? Nice, Mom.

VERNE

—his ugliness. I am.

NETTIE

You're selling me short. I care about these kids as much as you do.

GABE

More, apparently.

NETTIE

As if they were my own.

GABE

Could I come live with you?

NETTIE

We don't need to make any radical changes right now. We need to give it some time and work our way through these feelings.

VERNE

There's no we. There's only Gabe, Briana, you, and me. We're not a family. We're individuals, scavenging to stay alive. The longer we pretend to be a family, the longer we fool ourselves.

NETTIE

I think you need to chill out and think about some options.



VERNE

I think you need to butt out and face the facts.

*A tense moment.*

NETTIE

Okay. We're not getting anywhere. I'm getting some coffee. Let me know when you're ready to head out.

*She exits.*

BRIANA

How could you talk to her that way? She loves you.

VERNE

That's her problem. I didn't ask her to love me.

BRIANA

We love you.

VERNE

Right.

*Pause.*

BRIANA

Mom? You love us, right?

*VERNE is silent.*

BRIANA (cont'd)

You don't have to think about it, right?

VERNE

Briana ... don't take this the wrong way, okay?

BRIANA

What?

VERNE

I think I'm about done with love?

BRIANA

What?

GABE

About done?! Tell us something we don't know.

VERNE

It has nothing to do with you.

BRIANA

What are you saying? It has everything to do with me.

VERNE

It doesn't mean you're not loveable, okay? You are. It's just that ... that it will literally kill me to continue loving you.

BRIANA

But both of us?

GABE

Oh, thanks. Long as she loves you, it's okay, huh?

VERNE

See, the only way I can shut it off is to shut it all off. You don't need me anymore, really. The kind of love I have ... it doesn't do much good. Lots of people love you. Your teachers, Gabe maybe, Nettie. So you'll be okay.

GABE

Dad won't take me.

VERNE

Probably not. I talked to Nettie about other options. Military academy, Job Corps.

GABE

They won't take me because of my record.

VERNE

Nettie might.

GABE

You're actually doing this.

VERNE

Yes. And even if you're out on the streets, California is actually a pretty benign place for a kid. I mean it's not like the streets of Syria or Somalia. Stay with friends. Couch surf. You'll survive.

GABE

I don't have any friends.

VERNE

You'll survive.

GABE

Yeah. Yeah, I will. No thanks to you.

*GABE exits.*

BRIANA

Are you kicking me out too?

VERNE

You're too young.

BRIANA

But you would if I was old enough? Mom?! How can you even—!

VERNE

For your own good.

BRIANA

Mom, you're overreacting! Could you just try talking to him? Maybe Aunt Nettie is right. We should all go to counseling—

VERNE

I don't want to talk to him.

BRIANA

You might find out he's not so bad.

VERNE

Talking's no good. His actions speak louder than words. What he did ... with those other punks.

BRIANA

*(angry now)*

Why do you think he hung out with those guys?

VERNE

What do you mean?

BRIANA

Why do you think he didn't want to come home?

VERNE

Because he's a teenage boy, asserting his independence.

BRIANA

You really believe that's the reason?

VERNE

What else?

BRIANA

You. You!

VERNE

Me? He's a delinquent because of me? I did my best.

BRIANA

Well, your best leaves a lot to be desired. You think you're announcing some big change in yourself? You can't love us anymore? When's the last time you hugged Gabe?

VERNE

*(laughs)*

Hugged him? Is that what he wants?

BRIANA

It's not a joke, Mom!

VERNE

Really. Gabe needs a hug from his mom.

BRIANA

*Your* actions say it all, Mom. So don't go blaming Gabe.

*VERNE is silent.*

BRIANA (cont'd)

I'll get everybody so we can go.

*Brianna exits. VERNE looks into the Kelp Forest. The DOCENT prowls above.*

DOCENT

The spiny king crabs prowls the deep seafloor for live food, eating other crabs and sea stars. But when it can't find fresh food, it's quick to lunch on leftover scraps or dead animals that fall from above. Sharp spikes protrude from this crab's body, offering protection from predators.

SCENE 10

*Crossfade to the Splash Zone exhibit.*

DOCENT

Welcome to the Splash Zone, ladies and gentlemen! Discover a place where families can explore the ocean together. Dive into a kelp forest. Visit a coral reef kingdom, and explore a rocky shore. Rockfish, sharks and penguins call these places home. Welcome to their magical worlds!

*BARRY and MOE enter.*

MOE

Barry, we should go outside, walk down Cannery Row, find someplace right on the water and have a drink.

BARRY

Sure, let's go enjoy the sunshine and have a cosmo by the bay. And maybe from our table we'll be able to see the beach up the coast where a gay man was murdered by five teenagers. Won't that be lovely? How can you be so complacent?

MOE

I'm not being complacent. I just don't want to ruin our vacation.

BARRY

I think it's too late for that.

MOE

You need to calm down.

BARRY

With that maniac loose in the aquarium?

MOE

They're leaving. You're safe. You said your piece.

BARRY

I did not say my piece. You know, I was this close to getting into an actual altercation. An *altercation*. Me. I never get into altercations.

MOE

I think you may have an anger management issue.

BARRY

What? You're taking their side? That murderer and his Neanderthal family?

MOE

They didn't seem so bad. I think you're losing it a little.

BARRY

Losing it?! Okay, yeah. Maybe I am, but if any situation called for losing it, this is it! Don't you see that?

MOE

No. I think you could've handled the situation differently. // With more—

BARRY

Hold on, aren't you the one talking about our wild, untamable emotions? Our emotions are natural, right? Instinctual. But you want me to act all civilized around—?

MOE

You can't go around beating up people you disagree with.

BARRY

There should be consequences when someone attacks // another person unjustifiably.

MOE

And you're the enforcer?

BARRY

Well, *you* won't fight. (*off MOE's look*) Oh. I—

MOE

Yeah.

BARRY

No, I didn't mean to—

MOE

I know.

BARRY

—bring that up. Sorry. I wasn't thinking of that. But it's an example of what I'm talking about, right? You had to defend yourself. You were justified.

MOE

There was a way out. I didn't take it. I was too young, maybe. I wish I had.

BARRY

Okay, but when your back's against the wall, sometimes you need to fight.

MOE

I do fight. I fight by living carefully, thoughtfully.

BARRY

That's not always enough. It's clearly not enough.

MOE

I think you're wrong.

BARRY

You can't just "let it be," Moe. You have to take action. Because if you sit back and let shit happen, you know what? You run the risk of losing what you love the most.

MOE

I understand your position. It sounds fear-based.

BARRY

I'm not afraid. I see what needs to be done and I do it. *(beat)* Okay, yes, I think it's our *duty* to get married. I'm okay with that. I need you to see that.

MOE

Like I said, I need to—

BARRY

Yeah, you think about it.

MOE

Fuck it, Barry. Why do you have to be such a hard ass?

BARRY

And if I see that kid again on our way out? I'm not letting him off the hook again.

SCENE 11

*Crossfade to the entrance of the aquarium restaurant. GABE and BRIANA read the specials board.*

GABE

That's fucked up.

BRIANA

What?

GABE

Special of the day: blackened salmon with blueberry-balsamic reduction.

BRIANA

You don't like blueberries?

GABE

It's an aquarium. They serve fish at an aquarium?!

BRIANA

What's wrong with that?

GABE

It's hypocritical. They're all about rescuing fish and otters and providing a "safe and healthy environment." Not when it comes to making a buck, though. That's what I mean, everybody's a hypocrite. Nobody's exempt.

BRIANA

What about you?

GABE

Yeah, even me. If I had any balls at all I'd have walked out of here the second Mom started ragging on me. But no, I'm all, what do you want from me? I'll do anything, just don't kick me out.

BRIANA

I don't think I heard you say that.

GABE

I can take care of myself.

BRIANA

Maybe you can.

GABE

I can. Can you believe her? Sending me to Dad's?

BRIANA

I don't see that happening.

GABE

It might. I bet I could guilt him into taking me.

BRIANA

Because you're so persuasive. You really whipped Mom into line.

GABE

She's nuts. Totally off kilter. The whole world has lost its shit. That little freak, screaming at me about equality and respect, but he's the one judging me without even knowing who the hell I am. I don't deserve it. I never deserved it.

BRIANA

I just want things to be like they were before.

GABE

Not gonna happen. Mom's right. We're all looking out for ourselves. And I'm going to look out for myself. Starting right now. I'm not letting a little shrimp push me around.

BRIANA

What do you mean?

GABE

Time to push back.



BRIANA

No, it's not. There's never been a worse time to push back. You'll go right back to ... they'll put you in real prison this time.

GABE

So what?

BRIANA

You can't do this to me!

GABE

I need to let that prick know he's not better than me. *He's just like me!*

*GABE moves to leave. BRIANA stands in his way.*

BRIANA

Don't, Gabe. Leave him alone. You could get hurt.

GABE

He can't hurt me.

BRIANA

There's two of them!

*He pushes past her. She tries to grab him, but can't. She goes after him.*

SCENE 12

*Lights crossfade to the aquarium patio above the outdoor tide pools. The sunlight is bright, the air cold. Seagulls squawk. VERNE looks out at the bay toward Perdido Beach. NETTIE enters upstage and approaches her silently.*

NETTIE

Is it over? Between us?

VERNE

There's nothing between us, Nettie. There's never been anything between us. We're friends.

NETTIE

You're wrong.

VERNE

We're not friends?

NETTIE

We're more than that.

VERNE

We slept with each other a couple times. // It doesn't mean—

NETTIE

You don't want to admit it ... to me or yourself, but we're more than friends or best friends or best friends for life. You're in denial, which is okay, I understand. This whole deal with Gabe ... you can't think about anything else. I know. But you have to start thinking about what you're doing to yourself. Whether Gabe leaves now or not, he'll be leaving soon anyway, and you'll have your own life to deal with. We can make you happy—

VERNE

We?

NETTIE

Briana, me. We could fill your life up, if you let us in.

VERNE

I can't, Nettie. I let you and Briana in, I can't stop what else comes in.

NETTIE

We'll help you.

VERNE

Nope.

NETTIE

It's all overwhelming. That's life. So you have to rely on others for support. None of us can do it alone. We need family.

VERNE

I don't see it that way.

*Silence.*

NETTIE

I remember the first time. The first time we made love ... (*laughs*) at the pizza parlor. I'd always kind of wanted you, theoretically. I thought you were cute and you were so fucking funny, but I knew you weren't gay. So ... but that night, closing up, just the two of us. You were wrapping a pan of sliced mushrooms in plastic wrap at the prep table.

VERNE

How do you remember things like that?

NETTIE

And I was going out to the dining room to mop, wheeling the bucket past you. And I looked at you, the side of your face, and saw a little smudge of flour on your upper lip and cheek. And I stopped and wiped it off.

VERNE

Yeah. Then you attacked me.

NETTIE

All alone in that building. It was so good, Verne. So good.

VERNE

I ended up with flour on more than just my lip.

NETTIE

We were friends before that night. But after, we were not just friends *ever again*. We haven't been just friends for ten years.

VERNE

I wasn't thinking right. Rick had just left. His girlfriend was already pregnant. I was a little distraught.

NETTIE

Bullshit. I didn't attack you. You were into it just as much as I was. I know you love my body. I'm strong. I protect you. I make you feel good.

VERNE

It was a release, okay? Every time we do it, I just lie there after thinking, what the fuck did I just do? I'm sure it's different for you, right?

NETTIE

Goddamn. I'm on a high for days, *weeks* after.

VERNE

See? To me, I'd just want to forget about it as soon as it happens.

NETTIE

You're that afraid?

VERNE

*(laughs)*

Afraid? *(thinks)* Yeah, I guess. That's what makes the world go round ... fear. *(looking into the tide pool)* I mean, look at all these creatures, scuttling around, hiding under rocks, afraid of the next big threat that could end their life. That was me. Spiny crab, hiding in her crevice.

NETTIE

You don't have to be afraid of me.

VERNE

*(coldly)*

Actually ... I don't think I am anymore.

SCENE 13

*Lights crossfade to BARRY and MOE at the Splash Zone. GABE enters and BARRY sees him. They know immediately what's going to happen. No words need to be exchanged. BRIANA enters just as BARRY and GABE break for each other.*

BRIANA

Gabe, no!

*She grabs GABE's arm and holds on. MOE puts his arms around BARRY from behind, but BARRY wrangles free. GABE breaks from BRIANA and runs at BARRY. They collide and wrestle*

BRIANA

Gabe, stop! You don't want  
to go back ...

MOE

Godddamit, Barry! Stop right now!

*BARRY manages to twist GABE's arm behind his back. GABE howls. He drags GABE offstage, MOE and BRIANA following. We hear a splash. Blackout.*

SCENE 14

*Lights up on VERNE and NETTIE on the patio. They stare into the tide pools.*

VERNE

I'm sorry, Nettie.

NETTIE

Don't be. *(beat)* I can handle it. But Gabe's not that strong.

VERNE

He's young and he thinks he's strong.

NETTIE

Yeah, but he's not.

VERNE

And he thinks he's smart, but he's not. So that's good. Because that's the way kids survive until they get strong and smart. They don't know any better and they keep fighting.

NETTIE

He shouldn't have to fight.

VERNE

Everybody has to fight.

NETTIE

You think he's a survivor?

*GABE wails and sobs offstage. He enters, soaked from head to foot in saltwater, leaning on BRIANA. NETTIE runs to them. VERNE doesn't.*

NETTIE

Gabe! Oh, my god, what happened? Gabe, come here.

*She takes him from BRIANA and guides him to a bench where she sits with her arms around him. GABE continues to sob.*

BRIANA

He wouldn't listen to me!

NETTIE

Tell me what happened. Jesus, you're cold as ice!

BRIANA

It was that guy, that little guy.

NETTIE

Who started it?

BRIANA

They just saw each other and exploded. They didn't say anything. I couldn't stop him. The little guy's friend couldn't stop him either.

NETTIE

It's okay, Gabe. You're okay. Everything's going to be okay.

BRIANA

The little guy just ... overpowered him.

*GABE sobs harder at this.*

GABE

Fuck! Fucking prick!

NETTIE

Calm down, hon. Just calm down.

BRIANA

The guy dragged him over to the petting tank, lifted him off the ground, and threw him in.

NETTIE

Really?

BRIANA  
The little guy is a shrimp! A ... Mantis Shrimp!

NETTIE  
Wasn't security there?

BRIANA  
They came right after.

NETTIE  
Did they arrest him?

BRIANA  
They wanted to hold him until the cops got here. But Gabe wouldn't let them.

NETTIE  
What?

BRIANA  
Said it was an accident.

NETTIE  
They should have held him!

GABE  
No cops! I didn't want any cops!

NETTIE  
No, okay. I get it.

BRIANA  
They kicked him out of the aquarium.

NETTIE  
He's gone?

BRIANA  
They escorted him out. Said he couldn't come back. He's barred for life.

NETTIE  
Good. God, the nerve of that guy.

GABE  
*(gaining enough composure to talk)*  
It wasn't only him. I took it to him.

NETTIE

Gabe, honey, why would you do that? You can't be fighting. You're on probation.

GABE

*(breaking down again)*

I can't ... I can't let them ... push me ... anymore ...

*GABE sobs into NETTIE's shoulder a while.*

NETTIE

*(Looks to VERNE)*

Here's your survivor. See how well he's surviving?

*MOE enters and stops short.*

NETTIE

I thought you said they kicked them out?

BRIANA

Just the little guy.

*MOE approaches.*

MOE

How is he?

NETTIE

Do you mind!?

MOE

I'm ... I apologize ... for Barry. He's ... he's—

NETTIE

He's a fucking psycho // is what—

MOE

He's not a psycho.

NETTIE

Throws a fucking kid into—

MOE

The fight was mutual, ma'am. They just didn't like each other from the start for some reason.

NETTIE

Well, I'm taking my son's side on this.

MOE  
That's okay. I understand.

NETTIE  
Good. So you apologized. So go. (*MOE remains*) Is there something else?

MOE  
I wanted to talk to, to ...?

BRIANA  
His name is Gabe.

MOE  
Gabe.

BRIANA  
I'm Briana.

MOE  
I'm Moe.

BRIANA  
And that's Nettie and my mom, Verne.

NETTIE  
Don't introduce us!

MOE  
Nice to meet you all. I mean ... (*beat*) Can I talk to Gabe?

NETTIE  
Do you want to talk to this guy, Gabe?

GABE  
What's there to talk about?

MOE  
We got off on the wrong foot, obviously. Horribly wrong. And I ... just wanted to fix that, if I—

GABE  
You can't.

MOE  
I want to try, at least. Please ...

*Pause.*



GABE

I'm freezing. That water's fucking cold.

MOE

Since you mention it, the average temperature of the water in the bay is fifty-five degrees ... Fahrenheit. I guess ... they keep the exhibits ...

NETTIE

Gabe needs his jacket.

*MOE takes off his jacket and hands it to NETTIE.*

MOE

Here.

*NETTIE hesitates, then takes the jacket and puts it around GABE's shoulders.*

NETTIE

Do you want to talk to him? Just for a few minutes, while I get the car.

GABE

I don't care.

NETTIE

Verne? Do you want to ...?

*NETTIE stands. VERNE goes to GABE and puts her hand awkwardly on his shoulder.*

NETTIE (cont'd)

Briana, go to the locker and get his jacket, okay? Get all our stuff. I'll be back in couple minutes.

*NETTIE gives MOE a warning glance. He nods, then sits next to GABE.*

MOE

Thanks ... for talking to me.

GABE

I'm not talking.

*Pause.*

MOE

I know. I wanted to tell you, I (*beat*) I did time, too.

GABE

You did?

Not like you. Six months. MOE

For? GABE

Aggravated assault. (*beat*) I don't get into fights anymore. MOE

What happened? GABE

Guy came at me. MOE

Why? GABE

Figured out I was queer. MOE

How? GABE

I honestly don't know. Just had a feeling, I guess, and I didn't deny it. MOE

Where? GABE

West Texas. MOE

Jesus. GABE

Right? One place on earth you don't want to be gay. MOE

He came after you? GABE

With a pool cue. Fight lasted thirty seconds. He ended up with a concussion, a black eye, several contusions around the neck and torso, and a broken arm. I didn't break his arm, though. He fell wrong. MOE

GABE  
And they put you in prison.

MOE  
Whattaya gonna do? Texas.

GABE  
Right. *(pause)* I didn't ... I didn't shoot that guy.

MOE  
I know.

GABE  
I didn't know Chris had a gun.

MOE  
Must have been scary.

GABE  
Freaked me out. Freaked me fucking out. It happened in like ... a flash. I didn't even know the guy was coming onto us. He wasn't coming onto me. I wouldn't give a fuck if he was. Not like it never happened before. So what?

MOE  
I know. It happens. You deal with it.

GABE  
Right. But Chris. Jesus, he was ... I don't know. It's like, he was waiting for an excuse.

MOE  
How well did you know your friend?

GABE  
He wasn't my friend. It was kind of his ... posse. I was just hanging out with them.

MOE  
Well ... we don't need to talk about—

GABE  
No, I want to explain.

MOE  
Okay.

GABE  
So the reason I lied ... to the police. About the whole thing.

MOE

Did this Chris threaten you?

GABE

No. I lied because ... I was afraid. Afraid I'd get in trouble. With my mom. I didn't want my mom to know.

*VERNE's heart breaks.*

GABE (cont'd)

*(laughs)*

Sounds so stupid.

MOE

It's not stupid. You were a kid.

GABE

I guess.

*VERNE turns and exits.*

MOE

Any of those guys serve time with you?

GABE

Just one. We didn't talk much inside.

MOE

You don't keep in touch with ...

GABE

Chris? No. Haven't seen him since that night.

MOE

So what are you going to do?

GABE

I don't know. I don't have a fucking clue. I don't have any friends. Nobody likes me. I don't like anybody. I hate school. *(pause)* I don't know.

MOE

Me either. I mean, I still don't know what I'm doing, or who I am. Not completely. I learn something new about myself every day.

GABE

Really? You seem like ... the shit. Like, really together.

MOE  
It's an act.

GABE  
Bullshit.

MOE  
Okay, yeah. I'm together in some ways. But I'm not kidding, I never stop learning.

GABE  
I don't think I ever learn anything. I think I know some stuff, but then sometimes I don't think I do. Everything just turns to shit in my head.

MOE  
Don't worry about it. You'll figure it out. If you know one thing about yourself, hang on to that. Then if something else comes to you, hang on to that. And pretty soon, you start figuring yourself out.

GABE  
I know one thing.

MOE  
Good. That's good. That's a start.

GABE  
I know ... I know I don't care about gays.

MOE  
You don't care?

GABE  
I mean, I don't think it's wrong. I don't want you or your friend to think that about me. I was just being a jerk off before. (*beat*) I'm sorry.

MOE  
Good. Thanks. I appreciate it. (*beat*) Guess I better see how Barry's doing.

GABE  
Barry. Is he your ...

MOE  
We're not married.

GABE  
Oh.

MOE  
But he proposed to me. Just today.

Really? GABE

MOE  
I said I had to think about it, and he was disappointed. I think that's what put him on edge.

GABE  
So are you going to say yes?

MOE  
*(beat)*  
I think so.

*BRIANA enters with an armful of their belongings.*

BRIANA  
Here, grab your jacket.

GABE  
Thanks.

*He grabs his jacket and hands MOE's jacket back to him.*

BRIANA  
Where's Mom?

GABE  
I don't know.

BRIANA  
How you feeling?

GABE  
Wet.

MOE  
I'll leave you guys alone. Thanks for talking, Gabe.

GABE  
Thanks for ... you know ... whatever.

*NETTIE enters.*

NETTIE  
Okay, we gotta go fast. They let me park out front, but we need to move.

MOE  
Be seeing you.

NETTIE  
Your friend's out front. Barry. I talked to him.

MOE  
Still agitated?

NETTIE  
No, he seemed fine. Worried. He wants to talk to Gabe.

GABE  
I don't know.

NETTIE  
He wants to apologize.

GABE  
Really?

*MOE cuffs GABE's shoulder.*

MOE  
Face your demons, dude. *(laughs)* I'm kidding. Barry's a good guy.

*MOE exits. VERNE enters carrying a bag from the aquarium gift shop.*

NETTIE  
We have to go. I'm parked—

BRIANA  
You went shopping?

VERNE  
*(to GABE)*  
I got you a shirt.

GABE  
Okay.

VERNE  
You need to get out of that wet thing. I got you some shorts too, but it might be too cold for that.

GABE  
Okay.

VERNE  
Take off your shirt.

GABE  
Give it to me and I'll go into the bathroom.

NETTIE  
We don't have time.

VERNE  
Just do it here.

GABE  
Mom.

*She helps him off with his jacket, then his shirt*

VERNE  
Here's a towel. Here, wait.

*She takes a towel out of the bag and dries off his shoulders, back and arms. He submits to her ministrations like a child. She dries his chest, stops drying a moment, and touches his ribs gently.*

GABE  
Mom, I'm freezing.

VERNE  
Not much of a selection.

*She removes a T-shirt from the bag and gives it to him. He puts it on. Silk-screened on the shirt is an adorable otter floating on its back.*

BRIANNA  
It's hideous.

VERNE  
It's dry.

GABE  
I can't let anybody see me in this.

VERNE  
Grow up.

*VERNE puts her arm around GABE as they head toward the exit, NETTIE and Brianna following. The DOCENT watches them leave from up above.*



DOCENT

Welcome, ladies and gentlemen, to the Monterey Bay Aquarium! It's almost time for the feeding at the Open Sea exhibit. Life's in constant motion in the open ocean, a place where tuna and sharks speed past, sardines swarm in huge, glittering schools.

*As they exit, lights fade on the aquarium and rise on the adult and juvenile orcas.*

DOCENT (cont'd)

Nearby, colorful puffins await their next meal, brilliant jellies pulse through the water, ocean sunfish, or molas, look like the invention of a mad scientist, huge and flat, growing from a tiny size at birth to the size of a pickup truck.

*Lights begin to fade on the orcas.*

DOCENT (cont'd)

And don't worry about those sea turtles as they glide past. They rid themselves of excess salt through a salt gland near each eye, so they only appear to be crying. They're the happiest souls in the Open Sea!

*We hear the calls of orcas. Fade to deep blue, then black.*

*End of play.*