

# Cookie Play

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# **Cookie Play**

## **Characters**

Harriet Penini - middle-aged suburban Mom; she makes very good cookies.

Jim Penini - her husband

Frank 1 - a well-groomed government agent

Frank 2 - a government agent, somewhat handsome

A young man

## **Setting**

The play takes place in the Penini suburban home in Dearborn, Michigan.

The house feels familiar (perhaps from watching television sit-coms). It is middle-class

and unpretentiously and pleasantly Midwestern.

## Scene One

*A little boy's bedroom. The bed is perfectly made. A well-loved teddy-bear might be propped up against the pillows.*

*Harriet sits in a chair next to the bed with a picture book in her lap.  
The mother is telling the story of the pictures.*

### HARRIET

The little boy shouted to the red balloon, "Fly away! Fly away!" And the red balloon did. But the tough boys did not chase after the red balloon like they had done earlier. The boys began to shove the little boy. When the red balloon saw that his friend was in danger, he returned. And that was when the boys picked up rocks and sticks and threw them at the red balloon. "Fly away!" the little boy shouted. But the red balloon would not leave his friend. And then a stone hit the red balloon and the balloon burst; its balloon skin fell to the earth at the little boy's feet. Tommy, are you crying? Your Father doesn't like it when I read you bedtime stories and you cry. And then a miracle happens. Balloons from everywhere hear the little boy cry and they fly up and away from who ever it is holding them and they all fly to find the boy.

### A LITTLE BOY'S VOICE

Balloons!

*The sound of a little boy's hands clapping.*

### HARRIET

Shhh. He ties their strings together and makes one great big twine of a rope to grab hold of. And then...

### LITTLE BOY'S VOICE

And then!

### HARRIET

The balloons lift him up into the sky. He flies straight up into the air.

### LITTLE BOY'S VOICE

And no one ever sees him again.

### HARRIET

That's not in the book. He returns. He sees the world and comes back home.

### LITTLE BOY'S VOICE

It doesn't say that in the book.

HARRIET

It doesn't say. That's right, it doesn't say. But I think you should imagine he did. The End.

*The hum of a television's evening news broadcast can be heard in the background.  
It gets louder and louder as they talk.*

LITTLE BOY'S VOICE

Mommy.

HARRIET

Yes, honey?

LITTLE BOY'S VOICE

I'm scared.

HARRIET

JIM. THE TV IS TOO LOUD!

BOY'S VOICE

Mommy.

HARRIET

JIM, TURN THAT TV DOWN. ARE YOU DEAF.

*The television hum gets louder as if there are three or four newscasts all going at once.*

LITTLE BOY'S VOICE

Are the bad boys going to get me, Mommy?

HARRIET

You're my little Tommy. Nothing bad will happen to you. You're home with your Mommy. You're safe..

LITTLE BOY'S VOICE

I told them. I said God's watching you!

HARRIET

If other boys are mean to you, you say to them "God's watching you."

LITTLE BOY'S VOICE

I told them.

A person can't hear themselves THINK. WITH THAT ON. SAY IT TOMMY. SAY IT WITH MOMMY. GOD'S WATCHING YOU.

HARRIET/LITTLE BOY'S VOICE  
GOD'S WATCHING YOU.

*The TV sound snaps off.*

JIM'S VOICE  
Harriet? Harriet? Why are you shouting...?

*Harriet looks around, confused. Where is she? Why is she in her son's bedroom?  
Did she fall asleep in there?*

JIM'S VOICE  
Harriet? Harriet, get up. We have company. They're here.

*(To the guests: )* She must have fallen asleep...

Harriet. Harriet. HARRIET.

HARRIET  
Don't yell up at me.

JIM'S VOICE  
They said they would be here, and now they're here. They said they have information.  
Classified information. Tommy Classified. *(To the guests:)* I'll go get her.

*Jim enters the bedroom. He looks at his wife. She is frightened. She exhausts him.*

HARRIET  
Is it good information or bad information?

JIM  
I don't know. How would I know. Good. It must be good. We had no information and now  
they have information. So, that's good.

HARRIET  
No. Information is not good, it's not good.

JIM  
We don't know that. Throw water on your face. Anything is better than no information.

HARRIET  
You don't know that. Can we trust them?

JIM

Of course, we can trust them. They're from the government. The real government. They've stopped terrorism. And now they've come all the way here from wherever they come from where they're watching out for us, to tell us important information. We have to go listen to them now.

*They go.*

## Scene Two

*Harriet and Jim sit on their sofa and look back and forth at Frank 1 and Frank 2. The two government agents wear sharp suits and have very groomed hair. They are economic in their movements. They are also well-practiced in interrogation techniques that use the same unpredictability tactics as terrorist tactics.*

*Jim and Harriet are well practiced in not challenging authority and feeling guilty without a specific cause.*

*No one speaks.*

*An oven ding is heard.*

HARRIET

The cookies.

*Harriet hurries to the kitchen.*

FRANK 2

Your son.

JIM

Let's wait for...she wants to hear everything, and never trusts me when I relay what people say to her. Harriet, can you leave the cookies and...

HARRIET

Almost, almost, almost...

*They wait.*

*Harriet returns with a plate of cookies.*

Here we are.

FRANK 2

Your son.

JIM

Our son.

HARRIET

He wouldn't do that. That's not like him at all. Not how he was raised. There's been some confusion.

JIM

They haven't said anything yet, Harriet.

HARRIET

I just think they have to check their sources before they accuse...

JIM

No one's accused Tommy of anything.

FRANK 1

Is your son a Muslim?

JIM

We're Italians.

HARRIET

You're Italian.

JIM

We're Catholics.

HARRIET

I'm Polish.

JIM

Same thing.

HARRIET

No, it's not. I married an Italian, I didn't become one.

JIM

We're both Catholics. What does it matter Italian or Polish? That's not what matters. They're asking us questions.

HARRIET

It matters. There are Italian Muslims, aren't there? But there aren't Polish Muslims, are there? Are there? That seems like it would be silly. But maybe there are. I've never been to Poland.

JIM

We were both born here. Right here in Dearborn.

HARRIET

In Detroit, really, we moved to Dearborn.

JIM

Stop correcting me. He knows what I mean.

FRANK 1

It's okay, Mr. Pleninski.

JIM

Penini. It's Penini. It's Italian. The name's Italian. She's the Pole. If she were the man then maybe it would be ski, but I'm the man, so it's -ini.

HARRIET

I'm the Pole?

FRANK 2

Doesn't *-ini* mean little in Italian?

FRANK 1

Your son wasn't raised Muslim?

JIM

Of course, not.

HARRIET

We're Americans. The first President I ever voted for was Reagan.

JIM

You said you voted for Mondale.

HARRIET

Reagan. I voted for Ronnie. I never. What's wrong with you? Reagan.

FRANK 1

But now, after he left home, did your son become a Muslim?

JIM

I don't understand your question.

FRANK 1

You do.

HARRIET

No. It's a simple answer, Jim. No. Just say no. See? Nancy Reagan. I admired her. I was still young, but I admired her for how she watched out for Ronnie. And that meant all of us. That meant she was watching out for all of us.

FRANK 2

Your son.

HARRIET

He took courses in Muslim areas. But not just Muslim. World religions classes. At the university. Approved courses. What do they call it? Credited. Sanctioned?

JIM

Who knows what they teach these days.

FRANK 1

Exactly. What was he taught.

HARRIET

People at the universities should have more supervision. I've always thought that.

JIM

The bomb ended the war and saved everyone. That's what I was taught. And that's what should still be taught. That's what I told Tommy when he said he was being punished unfairly for writing his revisionist papers. Who are you to revise anything, I told him.

HARRIET

Who is anyone? What happened in history are facts, you can't revise facts. We had to invade Iraq. After what happened. Weapons or no weapons, 9-11 is a fact.

*All are quiet.*

JIM

Our son. You know something.

FRANK 1

Facts. Some facts you have to deliver in person. So they cannot be intercepted. Misconstrued. Revised or reviled.

HARRIET

I don't understand. Why would we revile him? We love our son.

JIM

What facts?

FRANK 1

Yes.

FRANK 2

We have more than the facts.

HARRIET

Oh.

JIM

What does that mean, you have more than...

HARRIET

Shush. Would you like a cookie? Fresh. You heard the oven ding. Please, take one. Tommy's favorite.

*They don't take a cookie.*

God is love. That is what needs to be taught. That's what my grandmother was taught. What my mother was taught. But nowadays no one can teach God anything, can they?

FRANK 2

In a Muslim country they teach their fucked up God thoughts every day.

FRANK 1

Frank.

*Awkward silence.*

Yes, Mrs. Peenitski. God is love.

JIM

Penini.

HARRIET

We love our son. He had a scholarship.

FRANK 1

Many.

FRANK 2

So much promise.

HARRIET

Yes. Many. So much. Thank you.

FRANK 2

All kinds of fancy-schmancy honors and awards and grants and fellowships for our little Mr. Shiny Reader Pants, is that right?

FRANK 1

Frank.

JIM

Mr. Shiny what?

HARRIET

Reader Pants. That's mine. I called him that.

JIM

What? When?

HARRIET

In a letter to Tommy.

FRANK 2

Sorry. No offense meant.

FRANK 1

Frank here thinks reading other people's mail makes him part of the family. An intimate.

FRANK 2

(shrugs)

JIM

You called him Shiny Pants?

HARRIET

You have my letters to Tommy?

FRANK 1

We don't have them. We know of them. They're in the report.

JIM

You put "Shiny Pants" in the report? I don't want that in the report. It makes him sound. Nice, Harriet. Real nice.

HARRIET

Please have a cookie. I was so hoping.

JIM

Shiny pants.

HARRIET  
IT DIDN'T MEAN ANYTHING. IT WAS PRIVATE BETWEEN TOMMY AND. SOME  
THINGS ARE BETWEEN A MOTHER AND.

JIM  
Harriet.

FRANK 1  
Frank, take a cookie.

*Frank 2 takes a cookie.*

FRANK 2  
Thank you, Mrs. Panninzi.

JIM  
Penini.

FRANK 1  
It means a lot to us that you baked us cookies. We appreciate the gesture of welcome and  
cooperation and downright coziness.

FRANK 2  
Damn good cookie.

FRANK 1  
See there? We can be family. Now, what was it your son studied? On scholarship.

JIM  
I don't know...he took classes, I'm not sure. I'm sorry. I never asked. Studies.

HARRIET  
Liberal arts. That can't be wrong.

JIM  
Some kind of social studies. Not socialist. American. Some kind of American studies.

FRANK 1  
(*Looking through the pages of a report:*) Art History?

HARRIET  
Yes. That's right.

FRANK 1  
Performance studies?

JIM

This study, that study, studies.

HARRIET

I like to think of him as an Art Major. It sounds like he's in the military; generals and majors. He had many. Majors.

FRANK 1

He had a hard time making a commitment?

FRANK 2

His Catholic faith?

JIM

Born and raised.

FRANK 1

Did your son make anti-Christian statements at a protest? Denounce his upbringing?

HARRIET

No. Tommy's not anti. He's idealistic. That's all. A college phase. Not anti. Opposed to. He doesn't like dogma. Ideologies.

FRANK 2

Even his country's?

JIM

This is America. We don't have an ideology.

FRANK 2

Art history this, then performance studies that. You want to know what's weakening our country? Post-colonial, post-structural, post-modern bend me over take it up the ass. They teach it's our fault the towers got blown up, so let's beat ourselves up for being the all time best country ever, let's roll over and get kicked in the gut again like stupid Pakistani beggars. I hate people who teach that. I want to...GOD!

*Frank 1 hands Frank 2 a brown paper bag.  
Frank 2 uses it to breathe and calm down.*

FRANK 1

Your son was a computer analyst, not an Art History buff.

HARRIET

Our Tommy? No, you have the wrong Tommy.

FRANK 1

We know this because he was an analyst for us. Not Frank and me, but the mother agency.

JIM

He worked for your mother?

HARRIET

Not their mother, their mother agency, headquarters.

FRANK 2

I wish our mother made cookies like you do, Mrs. P.

FRANK 1

Each one made with love. That's the secret ingredient, I bet.

FRANK 2

Jimbo. Why did your son travel to Pakistan?

JIM

What.

FRANK 2

Answer the question.

FRANK 1

Why did your son travel to Palestine?

JIM

He never did.

FRANK 1

Jim, it's a fact; we know the facts.

HARRIET

That part of the world always fascinated him. Since he was little. Because of Jesus. Billy Graham said the best bedtime stories were Bible stories.

FRANK 2

Jesus is not the reason.

HARRIET

He had a grant. It was for his schoolwork. Research. University approved. It was a school project.

FRANK 2

Wrong again.

JIM

He never...

HARRIET

He did. We never told you. We knew you would get upset. But Tommy never told me he was an analyst, that isn't...

FRANK 1

Our analysts never tell. Not even Mommy.

HARRIET

What kind of trouble...did you tell him not to get in touch with us? We've been worried sick. Is he safe? You know where he is?

FRANK 1

Mrs. Peninski, we've come to you, because we can't reach your son, and we think you can.

JIM

Penini. It's Penini.

FRANK 1

That's what I said.

JIM

Penini. Not Peninski. Not Paninzi. Learn how to say it the right way. Penini.

FRANK 2

That's what he said.

JIM

Because it's an easy mistake.

FRANK 1

Mr. Pleninski, we don't make easy mistakes. We make big complex mistakes. Like your son. And now we must correct our mistake. With your help.

FRANK 2

These cookies might do the trick.

FRANK 1

Will you help us?

JIM

Has our boy done something wrong?

HARRIET

What's wrong with you? You think they're here because he's getting a Presidential medal? Are you a brick?

JIM

You're the one who keeps secrets. You and Tommy.

FRANK 1

What secrets?

HARRIET

Tell us why you're here or let me speak to your supervisor. Or manager. I want to talk to someone. Higher up. In charge of you.

FRANK 1

Your son has our secrets and he's threatened to give them to the terrorists of the world.

*Frank 2 crushes a cookie between his fingers.*

FRANK 2

We are not going to let that happen.

JIM

What secrets do you have?

HARRIET

James. Do we need a lawyer?

FRANK 1

Have you done anything wrong? Have you entertained a terrorist right here in this living room?

FRANK 2

And we don't mean in your fucking TV.

*Frank 2 kicks in the television. All stare at the destruction.  
The world tips a little.*

Sorry. We'll pay to have it replaced. Sorry, sorry.

FRANK 1

You need to step outside, Frank?

FRANK 2

I'm good, Frank.

JIM

You're both named Frank?

FRANK 2

I'll buy them a new one, ok? No need to write it up. I'll pick up the bill.

HARRIET

I'm sorry.

JIM

Why are you apologizing?

HARRIET

Let me know how we can help Tommy. Whatever he's done, he didn't mean it. Let me talk to him and he'll understand he only means to help. He's the kind of boy who wants to save the world by telling the bad people, "God's watching you."

FRANK 1

He won't tell us what he knows and who's he told.

HARRIET

He will. Let me talk to him.

JIM

Harriet?

FRANK 2

The mothers always get it.

HARRIET

What do I get? I can't sleep at night. I go and sit in his old room and recite his favorite stories. You have him, don't you?

FRANK 1

We don't have anyone. That would be illegal.

HARRIET

I want to see him.

JIM

They said they don't have him.

HARRIET

They can't say they have him. Do I have to hit you up there with a brick?

FRANK `1

We need your help.

FRANK 2

Your country needs your help. Your son needs your help.

FRANK 1

Most of all.

FRANK 2

Most of all.

FRANK 1

Our hands are tied.

FRANK 2

Your hands are not.

*They wait.*

FRANK 2

We need to get Tommy to talk to us. Will you help us convince Tommy to talk to us?

JIM

Us? Our son...withdrew from us. He turned nineteen and...it was as if he disappeared. "Tommy, talk to us," we'd tell him. But then, he'd only say things to get us mad.

HARRIET

You. Get you mad. Because you were always attacking him for his ideas.

JIM

Don't tell them that.

HARRIET

They'd fight, just fight and yell because that was all they knew how to do with each other.

JIM

When he talked bad about the President for defending our country, you better believe I yelled at him. And then he called the Pope a child molester. And a Nazi sympathizer. And a woman hater.

HARRIET

You said all his friends were going to hell, so, of course he did.

JIM

I never said, don't say things like that.

FRANK 1

Your son had many Arab friends.

*The room is too quiet.*

HARRIET

No.

JIM

In the past. In school. They know. They spy for these kind of things, they know.

HARRIET

No. He did not have Arab friends.

FRANK 2

No?

HARRIET

Not Arab-Arab. Arab-American.

FRANK 1

And Jewish?

FRANK 2

And Black.

*Frank 2 takes out a little notebook and reads:*

FRANK 2

And a little Venezuelan he met in Mexico.

*Frank 1 shakes his head no at Frank 2. Frank 2 puts away his notebook.*

HARRIET

Tommy liked all people. He didn't judge.

JIM

Tommy was without prejudice. Even though we live outside Detroit. Tommy believed everyone was the same.

HARRIET

And deserves to be loved.

JIM

Before God. Created equal...

HARRIET

From love.

JIM

All under God.

FRANK 1

Mr. and Mrs. Penini, we're not here to piss around.

HARRIET

How rude.

FRANK 2

What did you say to that kind of Tommy talk?

HARRIET

Tommy talk?

JIM

What did we say?

FRANK 2

To that kind of unthinking sixties Pollyanna talk? To that ridiculous claim your son made. Did you teach him that? Did you teach him that traitorous lie? Because, Mr. And Mrs. Penini, everyone knows that everyone is not the same. That not all prejudice is bad. That without prejudice well – all our borders are left unprotected. Our skies! How do we differ a good thought from a bad? Prejudice. Judicious prejudice. So, what do we say to that kind of talk? Stop helping the enemy, is what we say! You failed your son if that is what you taught him. As parents. You failed.

JIM

Bad people are not the same as good, we know that, but we raised the kids to believe that everyone, in their hearts, deep down...

FRANK 2

In their hearts! You ever look into the heart of a godless terrorist, Mr. Pleninski? Don't talk to me about people's hearts. There are people who need their hearts cut right out of them and shoved up their nostrils so they can smell their own vile rottenness in the last few seconds before they die. No, people are not the same. Only people who want to permit evil believe we all are the same. We are not all terrorists.

FRANK 1

Do you want to permit evil, Jim?

*Jim stares blankly.*

FRANK 1

The German middle class permitted evil.

JIM

But we're not German...

FRANK 1

You are middle class.

FRANK 2

Backbone of America. Right, Mrs. P?

HARRIET

I think I would like a cookie too. Would anyone like another?

JIM

Stop offering them cookies. They kicked our TV in.

FRANK 1

Your son might never see his parents again.

HARRIET

Please. We want to help. We will help. We shouldn't be watching so much TV any way.

JIM

I would like them to leave. I am the king of my own house. This is still America and I would like them to leave.

HARRIET

They could have Tommy in one of those holes in the ground and we would never see him again.

JIM

Holes? What holes? They're from the government. We don't put people into holes.

HARRIET

STOP PLAYING DUMB.

JIM

I'm not playing...don't yell at me in front of them...

FRANK 1

We'll go.

HARRIET

We apologize. Apologize, Jim. Tell them you want them to stay.

FRANK 1

Frank.

HARRIET

Do you have him? Can you tell us if you have him in custody?

FRANK 1

Custody. That's a funny word.

FRANK 2

Kind of like torture. It can mean anything.

FRANK 1

Or nothing at all. We didn't mean to cause a fuss. We never want to cause a fuss. Frank.

*The Franks exit. Shell-shocked, Jim reaches for a cookie.*

*Harriet knocks it out of his hand. She runs to the door and calls out:*

HARRIET

COME BACK. PLEASE. FORGIVE US. WE'LL DO EVERYTHING YOU SAY.

*No response. She looks to her husband.*

You better pray they come back.

*Blackness.*

*Television lights flicker.*

*Undecipherable television noise.*

### Scene Three

*Jim and Harriet sit on the sofa in the exact same positions. A new batch of fresh baked cookies, begging for attention, is on a plate on the coffee table.*

*The two Franks enter, very jolly, with a dolly, and take out the old television. Jim and Harriet remain as they are. The two Franks re-enter with a new and more modern television.*

FRANK 1

Men of our word.

FRANK 2

If we damage something, we don't just replace it, we improve on it.

*Frank 2 offers the new remote to Jim. He does not take it.*

"Thank you for the new and improved TV." Why you're welcome, Mr. And Mrs. Peninzi-ski-li-nee.

*Frank 2 turns on the television.*

FRANK 1

Frank.

*Frank 2 turns off the television.*

HARRIET

Thank you.

JIM

*(muttering under his breath: )* He's the one who kicked it in.

FRANK 2

You're welcome, Mrs. Peninski.

HARRIET

Cookie? New batch. Sandy pecan.

*They are tempted. They each take a cookie.*

They're Tommy's favorite.

JIM

Tell us where our son is or I will go to the *New York Times*.

*Frank 1 sets his cookie down.*

HARRIET

Jim! No. He's never even read the *New York Times*...

FRANK 1

Are you trying to scare us with the big boogey-man, the big bad boogey *Times*? You promised to be cooperative. Accusations and threats are not cooperation. We have treated you with respect and you...

FRANK 2

Your son is a faggot subversive who has gotten hold of classified information that he is threatening to reveal worldwide when we are trying to break the backs of the terrorists. To keep him from leaking we will hang him by eight inch hooks from his lips and nips until he submits or quits whichever comes first unless you agree to help us reach him in a kinder and much more humane way. And you threaten us?! GOD HELP YOU AND YOUR SON.

MAN. I'd like to kick you in.

*He faces the new TV and is about to kick it in.*

FRANK 1

Frank.

*Frank 2 exits the house.*

*Frank 1 sighs.*

FRANK 1

Well, well, well. We are not keeping anyone, Mrs. P-ski. We've already told you that. I will tell you where your son is the best way I know how. He is in limbo. And that is a very dangerous place to be. And that is why we are here. We want to bring your son out of limbo, but to do so we need not just your cooperation. But your obedience. You must trust us.

HARRIET

What do you mean he is in limbo?

JIM

Is that some kind of purgatory?

FRANK 1

Did I say purgatory?

HARRIET

Is he safe in limbo?

FRANK 1

No one is safe in limbo.

HARRIET

Bring Tommy here and we will agree to all your conditions. We will sign everything. We won't talk to anyone. Not even each other. I will handle my husband.

*She gives a look to Jim that threatens his well-being.*

FRANK 1

Thank you. We can't do anything without your help. Your hands are free. That's why it's your hands we need. You have a mother's hands. And a mother's bosom. It's your bosom we need.

HARRIET

Please tell your partner that Jim apologizes for his *New York Times* outburst. Nothing like that will ever happen...

*Frank 2 enters.*

...again.

FRANK 2

I accept your apology. No harm done.

*Frank 2 picks up a cookie.*

FRANK 1

Your mother's bosom. That will save us all. We're all on the same team here. Right, Mr. Penini?

*All wait. Jim struggles.*

HARRIET

Jim?

FRANK 1

Jim?

HARRIET

Jim.

*Jim crumples and starts to cry. He hides his face and sobs.*

We will do everything. Everything you say.

FRANK 2

Is he going to keep crying like that?

HARRIET

Jim? He'll be fine.

FRANK 1

Your son is in limbo. And refuses to tell us what we need him to divulge. Which means he could be in limbo forever. That's the law. All threats to national security can be placed into limbo until that threat no longer exists. No one should be in limbo for too long. That is never a good thing. No one wants that. But your son is strong. He won't crumble. He's not like his Dad, after all. He's got a backbone. Maybe he gets that from you? You're the strong one, am I right?

HARRIET

We want Tommy home.

FRANK 1

We all want that. That's what the big guys have been asking: if we take Tommy Penini out of limbo, where can we put him until we get all the information we need and he's no longer considered a threat to the homeland?

FRANK 2

Where.

HARRIET

Where.

FRANK 1

We need to put him in a black site.

HARRIET

A black...? What's a black sight? Jim.

JIM

Black? You mean with black people? You want to put him in Detroit?

FRANK 1

No. Not that kind of black.

FRANK 2

A black site is a black hole, where no one knows you are there and no one knows if you will ever get out.

FRANK 1

The problem is there are interventionists who leak our black sites because they feel the need to cause problems in the name of human rights.

FRANK 2

We need a black site where we can securely question your son and determine who he is in his heart of hearts.

FRANK 1

We had three excellent sites. Overseas. But they were leaked. We know your son is connected to the leakers. We need to know what else will be leaked. We need to ask him questions. But we need no one else to know we know who he is or what he knows. If only we have a safe place where we could place him. But where might that be? Where might he be both safe and unseen? And no Congress interventionist could accuse us of criminal activity or falling into a moral abyss that betrays the founding principles of our great country.

FRANK 2

Where.

FRANK 1

Where might he be both safe and unseen?

HARRIET

Antarctica?

FRANK 1

Your son's life is on the line as are the lives of hundreds of good American Dads and breast-feeding Moms and their children who go to school and make the pledge of allegiance to the flag, one country...

FRANK 2

Indivisible.

FRANK 1

Under God. Your God, Harriet. The God of love and the United States.

FRANK 2

When I was a kid I used to think it said invisible. I didn't know what indivisible meant. So I would say "one nation, under God, invisible." Like the United States can be invisible.

FRANK 1

But some times the United States does need to be invisible. That's what your son does not understand. He believes in the tyranny of transparency. No country ever survived by being transparent. What's done in the dark should stay in the dark. We all know that in our heart of hearts, don't we? That is why we, Frank and I, not the whole USA, have to be invisible, and why we need our black sites.

FRANK 2

Where is the perfect black site for detainees today?

JIM

I don't understand a single thing you are saying.

FRANK 2

You don't have to understand what we say. Just do as we say

HARRIET

Here.

FRANK 2

What's that Mrs. P?

HARRIET

Here. Right here. This is where he will be safe. And out of danger. We will be the black site. The bosom of his family.

FRANK 1

God bless.

FRANK 2

You are a Norman Rockwell painting, Mrs. P.

*Frank 2 tears up a little.*

HARRIET

Oh. No need to cry. Shall I make coffee? Sandwiches? I want to cry too, I'm so happy. I thought Tommy was lost, but now. We're getting Tommy out of limbo. Everything will be okay again.

FRANK 1

I would like some coffee and a sandwich, Harriet, if it's no trouble. Frank?

FRANK 2

Yes, please.

*Blackness.*

## Scene Four

*Jim and Harriet sit on the sofa. A new plate of cookies is on the coffee table.*

*The two Franks enter, very jolly, with a dolly carrying a large, rolled-up rug with an Arabic design. They set it on the ground and unroll it.*

*A young man rolls out. The man is in gloves and a hood and is also bound with duct-tape. The man stands and tries to make a run for it.*

*Frank 1 strikes him efficiently and hard. The young man crumbles and is knocked out.*

FRANK 1

Sorry you had to see that. All under control now.

FRANK 2

Why do they do that?

*The Franks carry the hooded man down into the basement.*

HARRIET

He's home. He's going to be all right. We're all...don't say anything.

*Jim looks at Harriet.*

*The Franks enter from the basement.*

*They look and don't look at each other awkwardly.*

FRANK 1

Maybe you can make a batch of his favorite cookies.

HARRIET

We need eggs.

FRANK 2

You ran out of eggs?

HARRIET

I was too nervous to go shopping.

FRANK 2

That's crazy. You've got to keep a house stocked with the basics at all times.

HARRIET

Yes, I know. I'm sorry. I'm just too nervous to drive.

FRANK 1

Why can't your husband take you? Or send him with a list.

JIM

She doesn't let me buy the groceries.

HARRIET

He gets the wrong thing.

FRANK 2

It's eggs.

HARRIET

I write everything down, but still. After all these years, he still brings back the wrong thing.

FRANK 1

That's an old trick a husband does so he doesn't have to go. We're on to you, Jim.

JIM

It's not a trick.

HARRIET

It isn't. He really is incompetent.

FRANK 1

Let Frank take you to the store.

HARRIET

O, I don't know. What if someone sees us and wants to be introduced?

FRANK 2

Ho, ho - they'll think you're being a naughty housewife.

FRANK 1

Say he's your cousin. From Ohio.

FRANK 2

Aw, let them think she's got a younger stud. Right, Harriet?

FRANK 1

Butter and eggs, Frank-o. That's what we're doing here. Keep it zipped.

JIM

I can take my wife to the store.

FRANK 1

We prefer at least one of you stay here.

JIM

I'll go on my own. I can buy eggs.

HARRIET

Not jumbo.

JIM

What.

HARRIET

They're different sizes. Not jumbo. And we buy brown now. Not the white.

JIM

What. Eggs are eggs.

FRANK 1

We'll do the shopping from now on. Mrs. P. please make a list for Frank.

*A sound emerges from the basement, then stops.*

JIM

Should we get a doctor?

FRANK 1

I'm a paramedic. All is fine and good. I examined him.

JIM

I'm not good with this.

FRANK 1

Not good?

HARRIET

Jim. He's home. Be happy.

JIM

Excuse me.

*Jim grabs the newspaper and exits.*

FRANK 1

He's going to read the newspaper now?

HARRIET

In the Library. The bathroom.

FRANK 2

He's not a team player, is he? Everyone here needs to be part of the team.

FRANK 1

Yes.

HARRIET

Yes. He is. It takes him longer sometimes. But I'll tell him. He'll be on the team.

*Sounds emit from the basement.  
Frank 2 exits to the basement.*

FRANK 1

You should make that shopping list.

HARRIET

Yes.

*Blackness.*

### Scene Five

*Jim sits on the sofa. He is watching television with the sound turned off.  
Little sounds emit from the basement. Harriet stands at the basement door,  
listening.*

HARRIET

Turn that thing down.

JIM

They told you not to...

HARRIET

Shhh.

*A sound like a small dog's yelp is heard, followed by silence.  
Harriet hears Frank 1 coming up the stairs.  
She scurries back to the sofa.  
Frank 1 enters, no longer as groomed as he prefers to be.*

FRANK 1

What's on?

HARRIET

Nothing. Just the usual. Shows.

FRANK 1

I needed a...breather. I like the old shows.

HARRIET

Yes. They're the best.

*They watch.*

FRANK 1

Your son is a hard nut.

HARRIET

We know. I'm sorry. He wasn't always. When he was young, people thought he could have been anything. He was gifted. They all said. He was voted most likely to succeed. Everyone loved him. All the girls. But he was too shy. He never dated.

JIM

Harriet. No one wants to hear you go on and on.

FRANK 1

Don't be so rude. I'm happy to listen. Go on.

HARRIET

No, no, Jim's right. I shouldn't go on like I do.

*They are quiet.*

Lawyer. Doctor. Writer. Everyone knew he was going to be one of those everyone is so proud of. But then somehow he got off track. Confused. And what did he do? What did he do? He was so smart and gifted. Focus, we said. Direct your energy towards a real goal. No more saving the world. You're not a comic book superhero. No ones going to pay you to save the world.

JIM

Superheroes don't get paid.

HARRIET

They don't.

FRANK 1

Some do. Frank and I do.

HARRIET

You have to start thinking about your future, we told him. Plan for your future. Get a real job. Find a girl. Have children. I will, he said. After I change the world. Change the world, I said. You can't even tie your shoes.

*We hear the harsh whisper of Frank 2's voice coming up from the basement:*

FRANK 2 (offstage)

Why did you travel to so many places? Did you travel with a friend?

Who did you talk with when you went to Hawaii?

Write down the names of everyone in the company who lent you their passwords. We have our own list. You can circle names.

Don't fuck with us, we know if you give us fake names.

Why did you go to Jerusalem? Did you tell people you were on a holy mission?

Did you ever dance in a club named Shooters? Did you go home with Arab men after they bought you drinks? Did you make new friends after you joined the company? Were you their buttboy? Did you let them fuck you? Who taught you how to hide thumb drives up your asshole? Is La Shish your favorite restaurant? You say you stole data to out the company, but wasn't it Khal'l Anwat Mohammend who asked you for your thumb drives. We have pictures of you and Khal'l Anwat Mohammend. We could show your Mother. Would you like us to show your Mother the pictures we have of you. We have pictures. Do you know the names of every man who used your asshole to try to get to the thumb drives? They used you. They dirtied you. It's time you came clean. It's time you talked to us. Come clean, Tommy. Come clean.

*A cracking sound is heard. Then silence.  
Then "ding," the oven timer goes off.*

HARRIET

I almost forgot. Oatmeal raisin today.

*Harriet exits.*

JIM

We have a good life here in the U.S.A. He could have been a part of that. I don't understand why he...threw his good life away. For what? His life. His privileges.

FRANK 1

His rights.

JIM

For what? I don't understand.

FRANK 1

Some kind of mumbo jumbo about unmasking power and capitalist corporate evil and the threat of Big Brother. There is no Big Brother. And even if there was, Big Brother is not the one trying to eliminate America from the face of the earth.

*Frank 2 walks up the stairs. He enters.*

*He looks even worse than Frank 1. He looks as if he may sob at any moment.*

*He sits on the sofa with Jim.*

*Harriet enters with cookies.*

*She offers them in silence.*

*Frank 2 ravenously grabs cookies and snarfs a few down.*

FRANK 2

Your son's a frickin' stubborn hardheaded son of a bitch, you know that?

*Harriet exits.*

*Harriet returns with a glass of milk for Frank 2.*

Thank you, Mrs. P. Mind if I watch my soap?

*He takes the remote and changes the channel.*

HARRIET

So stubborn. When he was little, I wanted to shake him sometimes. I'd pinch him until he yelped. I chased him with a broom once. But I could never win. Never make him do anything he didn't want to do.

FRANK 2

Almost makes you admire the sonuvabitch.

HARRIET

I was so frustrated once I pushed a popsicle stick under his nail. He didn't flinch.

*The men look at Harriet.*

*Harriet laughs, then sighs.*

I stopped buying popsicles after that.

FRANK 2

That's just not normal.

HARRIET

May I bring him an oatmeal cookie?

FRANK 1

Cookies don't get results, unless they're used to reward good behavior. Has there been any good behavior to reward, Frank?

FRANK 2

You mean I shouldn't get any cookies either? Is that what you're saying, Frank? Is it? Say it direct, man, if you're going to say it. I hate this indirect shit.

FRANK 1

I don't have to say it.

*Frank 1 exits to the basement.*

*Frank 2 places his cookie back on the plate and follows.*

JIM

I don't like that they're both named Frank.

HARRIET

You think their names are Frank? Is that what you think?

JIM

I don't get us anymore.

HARRIET

Us?

JIM

Our country. U.S. Not you and me.

HARRIET

Oh. Maybe that's because you never got us in the first place.

JIM

Not us. U.S.A. When Reagan was President...

HARRIET

O sweet heavens.

JIM

We knew who was good and who was bad.

HARRIET

We're the good ones.

JIM

I voted once in my life. Once. Because there was only one time I believed my vote would be for something good. True. Reagan. Reagan would do good. He would beat back those with no faith. There was a time a President, a country, knew right from wrong. He's the only one I ever voted for. No one else. I never trusted any one else.

HARRIET

I think that's wrong. I think we should vote. I think the right thing to do is vote.

JIM

The right thing to do is to go to Mass again and take communion.

HARRIET

I liked it better when we could believe in little acts of make believe.

JIM

You like that they're here.

HARRIET

Why would you say such a thing?

JIM

You make them cookies. Cookies.

HARRIET

They always blame the mother when the son does not turn out...right. But look at you. Sucking your thumb in a little boy's bed because the big bad world is too hard for you. It's the Fathers that turn their sons strange, not the Mothers. If he's not right, you're to blame, not me. No one better start blaming me.

JIM

You're not right.

HARRIET

What did you say?

JIM

You're not.

HARRIET

We need you to be a team player, Jim.

JIM

God is not a little act of make believe.

*He slides onto his knees. He prays.*

JIM

Our Father, who art in heaven...

HARRIET

Get up. Get up.

JIM

Hallowed be thy name...I feel sick. Thy kingdom come. Kneel and pray with me.

HARRIET

Stop praying and look at me. God didn't listen to me, but Mary did. She answered my prayer. She brought my son back to me. Hail Mary, full of grace, blessed are thee, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb...

JIM

I don't know you. Who are you?

HARRIET

We are going to beat this. We will give them what they want and beat this. We are going to do everything we can to get them to love us and our son. I'm the Mother. Tommy is our son. Tommy is strong and I am strong. You have to be strong too.

JIM

I told you not to baby Tommy, I told you these ideas he came home with were turning him...wrong...but you said I was being a bigot. But I was right. Admit it now. I was...

HARRIET

If Tommy became a deviant and an enemy combatant it's because he was determined not to turn out like you in any way.

JIM

Our Father, who art in Heaven...

HARRIET

Ooooh. I could just. Ooooooh.

FRANK 1'S VOICE

*(From the basement:)* Mrs. Peninski? Is everything okay up there? Jim?

*Harriet goes to the basement door and calls down.*

HARRIET

Yes. We're good. Everything's good up here. Down there?

FRANK 1'S VOICE

The boys in the office have been thinking we should do something nice for Jim. They think he should go on a trip. All expenses paid. The base has great golf courses out in Arizona.

*Frank 1 comes up the stairs.*

FRANK 1

How's that sound, Jim? Golfing in Arizona. All expense paid. You'll like that, right?

*Harriet and Jim stare at each other.*

JIM

When would I be allowed to come back?

FRANK 1

Allowed? Whenever you like. Golf's your favorite thing, right? The ticket's already bought.

HARRIET

But I'll be left all alone.

FRANK 1

Don't be silly, Frank and I aren't going anywhere. We love our Mama P. What do you say, Jim?

*Blackness.*

## Scene Six

*Jim stands at the door with his suitcase and golf clubs.*

*Harriet is in Tommy's bedroom. The Franks are at the entrance to the basement.*

JIM

I pledge of allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the republic for which it stands, one nation, under God...now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

HARRIET'S VOICE

Call when you get there.

*Jim exits.*

## (Interlude)

*All lights go off in the house.*

*The new TV snaps on – it sparkles blue and white like Fourth of July sparklers. We hear Harriet's and a little boy's voice from the television. She is tickling him and blowing raspberries on his skin and he giggles and giggles.*

HARRIET'S VOICE THROUGH THE TV

You're so silly. A silly silly billy.

LITTLE BOY'S VOICE

I'm not silly. I'm not a silly billy.

HARRIET'S VOICE THROUGH THE TV

O yes you are. Yes, you are. You're my silly silly billy. You'll always be my little silly willy boy.

LITTLE BOY'S VOICE

*(laughing)* Stop it. Stop tickling me!

HARRIET'S VOICE THROUGH THE TV

Silly willy dilly milly filly mommy's lilly boy.

LITTLE BOY'S VOICE

I'm not your silly willy boy!

HARRIET'S VOICE THROUGH THE TV

I won't stop tickling you 'til you say I love you.

LITTLE BOY'S VOICE

*(laughing)* Love you, love you, love you!

## Scene Seven

*The television light goes on.*

*Frank 1 and Frank 2 are in pajamas that have war airplanes with smiling faces on them. They are in Tommy's bed.*

FRANK 1

Stay on your side.

FRANK 2

You stay on your side.

*Frank 1 hits him in the arm.*

FRANK 2

Faggot.

FRANK 1

Don't ask, don't tell.

*Harriet enters with a tray with two glasses of milk and a small plate with two cookies.  
She gives the tray to Frank 1 to share with Frank 2.  
She turns on a reading lamp by a reading chair.  
Frank 1 turns off the television with the remote.  
Harriet reads.*

HARRIET

“When the really evil times came, the Man who loved his Country said there will be no more listening to everybody else crying and shouting their boo hoo stories any more. Our stories are about handsome heroes and very brave girls. Yes, but we will also tell stories in secret. Stories that take us into the dark, because when the evil is looking for blood you too have to spend time in the shadows. You cannot always fight in the light of the sun. A lot of what needs to be done will have to be done quietly, in secret, without any discussion, using all the sources and methods and any means at our disposal, because if the enemy wants to be darker than dark to drink our children's blood, then we, the special ones, will have to out dark them and it will be as if light were never born.”

*She snaps the book shut.  
The Franks jump and then laugh at their response.  
They quiet down.*

HARRIET

We're doing the right thing.

FRANK 1

Are you going to be ok, Mrs. Tommy's Mother?

HARRIET

You cannot do the things that need to be done to love your children and keep them safe and strong and not lose your mind. There is evil and it wants to devour us, it wants Tommy. but I won't let it. I will be stronger than evil. I AM STRONGER THAN EVIL. I AM. NOT YOU. NOT JIM. NOT THE GOVERNMENT. NOT GOD. ME.

FRANK 1

Mrs. Penini...

HARRIET

WHAT.

FRANK 1

You're...losing it.

HARRIET

I'M PROUD I'M LOSING IT. NO ONE SANE EVER WON A WAR.

*Silence.*

*She takes the tray from the men.*

Lights out. Not one more peep out of either of you.

*She turns out the lights.*

*Blackness.*

*In the blackness we hear:*

FRANK 1 and FRANK 2

Peep peep peep peep peep.

*And a small echo:*

A LITTLE BOY'S VOICE

Peep peep peep peep peep.

*A basement light is turned on.*

*Harriet stands near the young man in a sleeping bag tied to a cot.*

HARRIET

Do you know why we will the win the war, the handsome man asked the crowd. Because the terrorists underestimate the power and appeal of freedom. And all the people looked at each other and smiled because they knew this was true.

*The young man mumbles in his sleep, something low and vicious and then returns to sleep.*

*Harriet touches his hair very gently.*

A LITTLE BOY'S VOICE

And that's when they freed all the balloons?

HARRIET

There are no balloons in this story.

A LITTLE BOY'S VOICE

Do boys throw stones?

HARRIET

That was in the Bible, that was in the times of Jesus and before.

A LITTLE BOY'S VOICE

What's "waterboarding", Mommy? What's goozie hydration? What's pickle-tickling, boo-boo toasting, swirlie licking, doggie dancing, fist-finding, truth barking?

HARRIET

Go to sleep.

A LITTLE BOY'S VOICE

Mommy?

HARRIET

There's an enemy that lurks and plots and plans and wants to hurt good people. And that's why we have to do all kinds of things we don't think we should. Because we have to clean up big messes that other bad countries make. When you grow up to be a powerful man, you'll understand.

A LITTLE BOY'S VOICE

Are you mad at me? Do you love me, Mommy?

HARRIET

No one loves a terrorist, Tommy.

*Silence.*

HARRIET

Don't be stubborn. Tell them what they need to know. Make it up if you have to...now, go to sleep. You hear me?

*The young man whimpers in his sleep, like a dog dreaming.  
Harriet licks her thumb and rubs smudge off a bruise on his face.*

*Blackness.*

### **Scene Eight**

*Frank 1 and Frank 2 enter from the basement worse for wear. They collapse.  
Harriet hands out freshly baked cookies from a cookie tray to Frank 1 and Frank 2.*

HARRIET

Cookie break.

*Harriet hovers at the basement door.*

FRANK 2

Maybe you would like to sit down, Mrs. P?

HARRIET

I can't.

FRANK 1

Please.

FRANK 2

We don't like it when the woman moves about.

FRANK 1

Please, sit. We're all on break.

HARRIET

How long will Jim be at the golf course retreat in Arizona?

FRANK 1

As long as needed.

HARRIET

Good. Let him tee off, hit those little pimply balls towards a tiny hole far far far away, far away from what is needed. I bet you think that's not nice of me? Not nice. I have been very nice to that man for too long. And what does he do? Go weak on me! Retreat. Play golf. All those golfers need to stop taking freedom and democracy for granted, because that is what is being taken away. Freedom and democracy are not for free. They come at a price. A very high price. They don't want to see that. They want to stick their heads in the ground. They should be beaten senseless with those clubs of theirs. Not nice, I know. But we've got to be stronger than nice. That's right. ~~There is evil and it wants to devour us, it wants Tommy, but I won't let it.~~ We have to be more than nice, we have to be stronger than evil.

*Frank 2 takes a cookie.*

*Frank 1 takes a cookie but crushes it in his fist in complete frustration.*

FRANK 2

Not in a good mood today?

HARRIET

I can make sandies.

*Frank 1 throws himself into a sofa cushion and screams.*

*He pops back up.*

FRANK 1

I'm fine.

*Frank 2 ignores him.*

*They take their break.*

HARRIET

I've been doing some research. On the internet. About interrogation. And everything. I wanted to maybe find out why you're not getting results and what maybe the reason is. You can find out everything on the internet now. Choke holds. Pressure points. SERE training.

FRANK 1

O great.

HARRIET

What I read is that other people who do the...interrogation procedure...found out that they actually got better results with their...clients...when they offered them cookies.

*Frank 1 and 2 stare at her.*

FRANK 1

You have got to be kidding me.

HARRIET

No, I even printed it out. So you could...

FRANK 1

I'M SICK OF COOKIES.

HARRIET

I see.

FRANK 2

I'm sick of you.

HARRIET

Don't start.

FRANK 2

Want to hear something really good? Roger just called while you were taking a crap. He wanted to brag about their mother in black site number 2.

FRANK 1

The old lady in the shoe?

FRANK 2

She got her little diaper insurgent to crap on the third day, which led to a raid, a weapons bonanza, and a truckload of new detainees to ghost out to good old Oklahoma, U.S.A.

FRANK 1

FUCK.

FRANK 2

Language.

FRANK 1

They got a raid?

FRANK 2

The pressure's on.

FRANK 1

We're getting nothing here.

*He beats the hell out of Harriet's tray of cookies.*

FRANK 2

You're on cookie probation.

FRANK 1  
Why won't he break?

HARRIET  
You promised success.

FRANK 2  
There's talk.

*Harriet gets a broom.*

FRANK 1  
Talk?

FRANK 2  
That we can't produce results like in the old days, that we're letting the suburban lifestyle make us soft.

FRANK 1  
That's bullshit.

FRANK 2  
Watch your mouth.

FRANK 1  
Sorry, Mrs. P.

FRANK 2  
We haven't produced any results. I wouldn't be surprised if they relocated the entire operation.

FRANK 1  
Frikk'n' frankfurters, give us some time. We're not machines. They used to call us the gulag duo. Then they came up with all those new rules! And now you have to second guess every piss you take. And then they come down even harder and say we need results.

FRANK 2  
Black site number two produced them, and they have the same rules.

FRANK 1  
Sure, Roger and Roger played within the rules, but you know the Old Lady in the Shoe said she was not bound by any Senate-passed resolution, you know she did what ever she had to do.

FRANK 2  
They're getting bumped up.

FRANK 1

The Rogers?

FRANK 2

Yeah, can you believe that?

FRANK 1

If they caught even one terrorist or even one sympathizer in the sweep, they deserve their bump.

HARRIET

What do we have to do?

FRANK 1

You tell us.

FRANK 2

He won't give us what we know he knows. He's...

HARRIET

Stubborn. I know. He was always stubborn. Even as a baby. Even before he was born. Stubborn. Wouldn't come out. I carried and carried.

FRANK 2

Women need to take control of their bodies. Force the birth. Sometimes force is the only blessing God provides. Force feedings. Forced labor. Force is a life saver.

FRANK 1

Lid it.

FRANK 2

I'll take you out.

FRANK 1

You and what army?

HARRIET

He was a Sunday child. I was in church and my water broke. Jim didn't even notice. The man was walking down the aisle to take communion. I thought God doesn't want me to make a mess in his church. Women saw and took charge. They got me to the back of the church. And Tommy was born. A happy chubby little baby.

*Sounds are heard from the basement.*

*A moment.*

*Harriet exits to the kitchen.*

FRANK 2

Stubborn bastard.

*Harriet returns with more cookies.*

HARRIET

Chocolate chip.

*Frank 1 and Frank 2 each take a cookie.*

FRANK 2

These are great. You've outdone yourself this time, Mrs. P.

HARRIET

The secret is...

FRANK 1 and FRANK 2

Love.

HARRIET

There's more butter per cookie than oil in Saudi Arabia.

*The Franks laugh and continue to eat cookies.*

FRANK 2

I wish I had had me a mother like you. Not the white trash drunk that raised me. I'd be a different person today.

HARRIET

You'd be Tommy.

FRANK 2

That's not what I meant. You know, we love your son, Mrs. P. We just need him to tell us where the thumb drives are. We always liked your son, even from the beginning.

FRANK 1

Do you want to know how we first interfaced with Tommy? On the dance floor. I wish I had pictures. He was on the dance floor with Frank there. Frank let their bodies speak. Isn't that right, Frank? You might not guess it, but Frank's physical talents speak the phallic dream as pure poetry. That right, Frank?

HARRIET

You danced with my son?

FRANK 2

I would have foxtrotted with bin Laden if that's what my country asked of me.

*They are quiet.*

HARRIET

I haven't danced in years. When was the last time? I don't know...I don't know why that makes me cry.

FRANK 1

Frank?

FRANK 2

Yes, Frank?

FRANK 1

I'm going to put on the music. We're human beings after all.

*He looks over the CD collection.*

FRANK 1

Ah, perfect.

*He puts on Louis Armstrong singing "It's a Wonderful World."  
The Franks eat cookies as they listen.*

FRANK 1

Frank.

FRANK 2

Mrs. P, would you like to dance?

HARRIET

That would be silly.

FRANK 2

Not for me. It would be an honor and a pleasure.

FRANK 1

Frank is a handsome dancer. Responsive as he leads.

HARRIET

But we're not at a wedding or anywhere.

FRANK 2

May I have this dance?

HARRIET

Is this permissible?

FRANK 2

We're on break, Mrs. P. Affection and touch between human beings is always permissible.

*She takes his hand. He puts his other hand on her waist.  
They dance, awkward at first and then quite beautifully.  
Frank 2 pulls her closer into him. They dance.  
Frank 1 eats a cookie.*

FRANK 2

Was Tommy a Mamma's boy? Did Mommy dote on Tommy?

HARRIET

I don't understand.

FRANK 2

All in good time, all in good time.

HARRIET

I remember dancing with my son. At his graduation. He was so beautiful. I remember. I was so happy. The future was so light and beautiful. I wasn't alone or terrified. I believed in the future. Tommy was going to college in the Fall. Everyone was going to fall in love. I was in love too. Dancing with my son. So happy. We were both so innocent.

*Frank 2 falls over. Harriet lets him drop to the floor.*

FRANK 1

You clown, get up.

*Frank 2 gags, tries to vomit. Harriet backs away from him.  
Frank 1 kneels by his side.*

FRANK 2

The cookies...the cookies...

*Frank 2 falls over. Frank 1 looks up at Harriet. He too feels woozy.*

FRANK 1

Harriet?

*Harriet sprays him with mace.  
He screams. She covers his mouth with a ready wet rag.  
He falls over and is unconscious.  
She pulls out hoods and duct tape.*

*Blackness.*

*The sounds of duct tape being pulled, torn and used to tie up two men.  
The sound of two bodies being dragged and dropped down the basement stairs.  
In the blackness, through the opened basement door, we hear:*

HARRIET

Tommy? Tommy? It's me. Mommy. Everything's going to be okay, Tommy. I'm going to set you free. Promise to behave.

### Scene Nine

*Lights up on the living room.  
Frank 1 and Frank 2 are gagged and bound tight with duct tape in the basement.*

*A young man bursts through the basement door.  
He is in terrible condition. He collapses on the floor. He is too weak.  
Harriet enters from the basement. She is strong. She could destroy someone.*

HARRIET

STOP RUNNING! STOP!

*He stops.*

I have you, I have you, sit down, Tommy...we must think...

YOUNG MAN

I will tell EVERYONE.

HARRIET

No no no no no...no telling. We'll hide. Forever.

YOUNG MAN

I want to be seen. I'm not AFRAID.

HARRIET

TOMMY. SIT DOWN

*Tommy sits down on the floor.  
He begins to cry.*

YOUNG MAN

Tell someone about me. Please. The Red Cross. The Guardian. Tell them that I exist. Where I am. Please, tell my family. They must be worried, my Mom...

HARRIET

Tommy, I'm right here, you're home...

YOUNG MAN

You...?

HARRIET

Yes, but we have to hurry, we have to go...

*Sounds from the basement. A Frank is crawling up the basement stairs.*

YOUNG MAN

Where will you take me. Who are you?

HARRIET

I'm Mommy. You know I'm Mommy.

YOUNG MAN

Do you know me, do you know who I am?

HARRIET

You're my boy, my Tommy.

YOUNG MAN

Do you know why this is happening to me?

HARRIET

They said you went rogue. You went rogue, Tommy. I know you were only trying to do the right thing. We're all trying to do the right thing.

YOUNG MAN

Don't lie to me.

HARRIET

You're Tommy.

YOUNG MAN

No, no. TELL ME THE TRUTH.

HARRIET

I'm your Mommy. I'm Tommy's Mommy. I wouldn't lie to you.

FRANK 1 (*from the basement stairs*)

Mrs. Penini...

*Tommy stands.*

HARRIET

I can take the car to the other block. You can hop the Schmidt's fence and get in the car. We can drive to Canada. Like Vietnam.

FRANK 1(*in pain, from the basement*)

MRS. PENINI, IT'S NOT TOO LATE.

YOUNG MAN

I'm not who they say I am. I'm not helping the enemy.

FRANK 1

WE CAN SAVE YOUR BOY.

*Frank 1 is crawling up the stairs.*

YOUNG MAN

I'M NOT YOUR BOY.

HARRIET

Shh, shhh, we have to go now.

*Frank 1, groggy and struggling, appears at the top of the stairs.*

*He's been spitting blood.*

*Harriet slams the basement door on Frank 1.*

*The sounds of him tumbling back down the stairs are heard.*

YOUNG MAN

LET THEM SHOOT ME IN THE STREETS.

HARRIET

Keys, keys, where are the keys.

YOUNG MAN

LET THE WORLD SEE.

HARRIET

Not Canada. No. The Upper Peninsula. There's no tracking in the Upper Peninsula. No one lives up there. We can disappear.

YOUNG MAN

I WANT THE THE THE WORLD TO SEE ME.

*She sits him down on the sofa or ground.*

HARRIET

You stop this noise and you listen to me, young man. I'm your Mommy. You listen to me. Why must you be so difficult? Why couldn't you give them the thumb drives like they wanted and come home safe and sound...you were always so...you and your red balloon. I had to always tell you that story but I never liked the way it ended. Why not Winnie the Pooh? No, you had to have the revolution of the balloons. No balloons are coming for you, Tommy. There are no balloons.

FRANK 1 (*from the basement*)

Mrs. Penini...

YOUNG MAN

You're the enemy.

*Harriet loosens her hold on her son.*

YOUNG MAN

I'm not afraid. I'm powerless. But I'm not afraid. I tell all my enemies...

HARRIET

The government is not your enemy. Your mother is not your enemy. You don't understand reality, what has happened. The reality is...we have to run away.

YOUNG MAN

Let them hang my body from a pole or wire. In the street. The photographers and dogs can chew on my remains. I will not hide. I will not say wrong is right or right is wrong. The government does not have a conscience. It is not a human being. I have a conscience. If you have a conscience you cannot say wrong is right, right is wrong.

HARRIET

No one is hanging you in the streets. This is the USA.

*The young man turns on the television.*

YOUNG MAN

SEE. SEE.

TELEVISION

Kill him! Kill him! Yes, like that! Cut his throat properly. Cut his head off! Burn him to make him feel what hell is like and then cut off his head! Dogs all of them. May their parents come to the same end.

HARRIET

TURN THAT OFF.

TELEVISION

God is great!

YOUNG MAN

God is gone

TELEVISION/YOUNG MAN

GOD IS GREAT/GONE!  
ONE NATION. UNDER GOD. INDIVISIBLE.

YOUNG MAN

It's okay, Mommy.

*Static. The television is hacked.*

TELEVISION

Mrs. Penini, it's going to be okay. Trust us. All you have to do is untie them. They're your friends. We'll forget about this. We promise you. No one will hold it against you. You're not to blame. We shouldn't have involved you. You've had a breakdown, but you're not to blame. You weren't properly trained, like Frank and Frank.

HARRIET

Where did I put my car keys?

YOUNG MAN

In your flour jar.

HARRIET

What?

YOUNG MAN

This whole time. I put the drives in the bottom of the flour jar. I put them there last Christmas time. After you made the sugar cookies to take to Aunt Nancy's.

*The young man exits to the kitchen.*

TELEVISION

We forgive you and your son. We will give you clemency. No harm done. The Nation is still safe. We just want the hard drives. And then everything will be okay.

YOUNG MAN (*in kitchen*)

Burn in hell, hell, burn in hell...

HARRIET

It's going to be ok.

TELEVISION

Yes, it's going to be ok. But you must let us help you now.

*Frank I has made it up the stairs and enters from the basement, again.  
He crawls towards his phone.  
Harriet stares at him.*

*She beats him senseless.  
She stops.*

*Tommy enters from the kitchen covered in flour.*

YOUNG MAN

I swallowed them.

Mommy?  
Mommy?

*She looks at him.*

YOUNG MAN and LITTLE BOY'S VOICE

It's me.

HARRIET

Thank God. Let me hold you.

*She holds him. She shakes. She tries to wash his face.*

YOUNG MAN

You have to let me go now.

HARRIET

I'm never letting you go.

YOUNG MAN

We're at the end, Mommy.

LITTLE BOY'S VOICE

Read the end, Mommy.

HARRIET

The end? I don't. And then...a miracle happens.

YOUNG MAN and LITTLE BOY'S VOICE

BALLOONS.

HARRIET

Balloons from everywhere hear the little boy cry.

YOUNG MAN and LITTLE BOY'S VOICE

Yay.

HARRIET

They flew up and away from whoever it is holding them and to the little boy. We'll save you, they said.

*She cat-licks her fingers and combs his hair.*

YOUNG MAN

They know I know things. They know I'll tell things. I have to go. I love you, Mom. I have to go.

HARRIET

Indivisible.

*She lets him go.*

*Balloons fall from the sky.*

*The young man grabs their strings and is wrapped in them.*

*The balloons lift the young man up and take him away into the sky.*

*A little boy's voice comes from the TV.*

LITTLE BOY'S VOICE

The balloons tied their strings together and made one great big twine of a rope for the little boy to grab hold of. And he did. He flew straight up into the clouds.

*Harriet claps like a little child.*

*The sound of a little boy's giggling and clapping..*

*The little boy's voice begins to echo.*

LITTLE BOY'S VOICE

Mommy?

HARRIET

Don't be afraid. You're my little Tommy. Nothing bad can happen to you. Time to go to sleep. Time to say good night to Mr. Moon.

LITTLE BOY'S VOICE

Good night, Mr. Moon.

HARRIET

Good night. Good night, Mr. Red Balloon. Good night, Mr. Government. Good night, Mr. Television. Good night good and bad people, all of you.

*Harriet reaches for a cookie.*  
*She nibbles on the cookie to calm herself.*

LITTLE BOY'S VOICE

Mommy.

*She remembers.*  
*She spits it out.*

Mommy?

HARRIET

What is it, Tommy.

LITTLE BOY'S VOICE

Why do little boys grow up?

HARRIET

So you can be a man and make your Mommy proud of you.

LITTLE BOY'S VOICE

I want to be a monkey.

HARRIET

No.

LITTLE BOY'S VOICE

Can I be a ballerina?

HARRIET

Tommy.

LITTLE BOY'S VOICE

A balloon! I want to be a balloon.

HARRIET

Ok. You're a balloon. Good night, Mr. Balloon.

LITTLE BOY'S VOICE

Good night, Mommy.

HARRIET

Good night.

Good night.

Don't let the bedbugs bite.

*End of play.*